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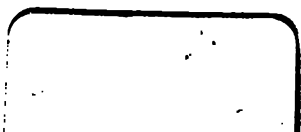
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FLORENCE SACKVILLE,

OR

SELF-DEPENDENCE:

An Autobiography.

BY MRS. BURBURY.

"Is it the tender star of love?
The star of love and dreams?
O no! from that blue tent above,
A hero's armour gleams.

"O star of strength! I see thee stand,
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again.

"The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute and still,
And calm and self-possessed.

"O! fear not, in a world like this,
And thou shalt know, ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is,
To suffer and be strong."

"The Light of Stars." By H. W. LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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Old Bailey.

FLORENCE SACKVILLE;

OR,

SELF-DEPENDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

AND now I must hurry on; for dark shadows began to thicken round my path. Home, with its quiet joys and comforts, had lately become more and more endeared to me by the increasing affection of my mother and sister, which suffering and sorrow had developed; and the violent temper and reckless courses of my father, though they marred our peace and happiness, yet drew the bonds of affection closer between his wife and her children.

From the pleasant, though subdued and fading light in which Ingerdyne now appeared to me, I was about to emerge, and enter upon the gloom of poverty and grief. What remains to be told of poor Milly's fate, therefore, must be quickly related.

At the archery meeting, Milly gained the first

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prize ; greatly to the satisfaction of everybody but Lady Mowbray, who had been practising for weeks, and whose mortification at her defeat was intense.

What took place between the victor and the vanquished, at their *tête-à-tête* in the tent after the contest, I never knew ; but I met them coming out, and almost started at the expression of their countenances. Milly looked flushed and incensed, her eyes kindled with passion and indignation, and her lips quivered with excitement ; while Lady Mowbray was pale as a ghost, her lips white with suppressed emotion, and her manner lofty, but icy cold. She appeared as if she had goaded her enemy to madness with the spur of her bitter taunts, and now triumphed in her vengeance.

They both passed me without a word, each turning into paths that branched off in opposite directions.

Half an hour after this, the sound of the bugle called us all to the luncheon tent, and on entering it with Jane Aubrey and Mr. Bellair, I saw Milly leaning against one of the flower-wreathed pillars, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, listening to Sir Wallace, who was evidently trying to persuade her to take some step to which she was averse. As soon, however, as he saw that he was observed, and his *tête-à-tête* commented upon, the

baronet came gaily forward, and occupied himself with his duties as host, while Milly made her way through the crowd, and went out into the grounds.

"That girl won't live long," said a gentleman, who stood near to me, as she passed us. "If ever Death marked any of his prey before he struck, there is a victim."

After lunch, Jane Aubrey and I walked to see a favourite view from the upper end of the park, and wandered about until our watches told us it was quite time to return, if we hoped for dinner.

Passing by the lake arbour on the side nearest to the house, we saw Milly sitting there with a note in her hand, and weeping bitterly. Our first impulse was to go to her; but she heard our approaching footsteps, and starting from her seat, ran quickly past us, dropping in her flight the paper she had been reading. Jane was so astonished at her strange manner, that she did not observe the note; which, as she looked after Milly's retreating steps, I hastily picked up without speaking, intending to return it to its owner when we should be alone. At dinner, Milly was calm and pale as a statue; she seldom spoke, and when she did, her words were few and cold: there was no trace left of the light-hearted girl I had known a year before.

At ten o'clock the ball guests began to arrive, and very soon the rooms were crowded. Lady

Mowbray was in her element ; although, even in this hour of pleasure, she sought every opportunity of insulting and mortifying poor Milly. Surely, as the raven scents blood, she saw the catastrophe that was coming, and like a fiend hurried it on. Everybody observed and commented upon her manner, for most people loved her victim ; while even those who flattered their hostess most obsequiously, condemned her in their consciences.

During the early part of the night, I noticed a propitiating beseeching gentleness in Milly's manner, which seemed to implore from Lady Mowbray a cessation of hostilities ; and I do believe that one kind word or smile would have saved the hapless girl from the abyss which even then yawned to engulf her. But it was vain : none ever looked for tenderness from Lady Mowbray, and found it.

At last, it seemed as if Milly, assured of this, became reckless ; for her laugh, once so gentle and sweet, sounded strangely in the room ; and her quiet manner had changed to a *fiercé* and recklessness very painful to witness. I was astonished and angry : had I been older, I should have known that this manner evinced the forced spirits of desperation, and should have pitied, instead of condemned her. She waltzed and danced indefatigably, met Lady Mowbray's sneer-

ing smile with a defying laugh; and altogether was as unlike herself as possible.

Once we stood for a minute together at the top of a quadrille, and I could not refrain from whispering,—

“You vex me to-night, Milly! Are you mad, that you fly about so?”

The expression of her face changed suddenly, and she said, in suppressed tones, but with a sharp stinging voice,—

“Mad! yes, quite. To-morrow, remember that I told you so. Do not forget,” and in a moment she was dancing again.

I was very tired when the ball was over, for I had danced all night, and, passionately fond as I am of the amusement, was fairly tired out; so as soon as the last carriage drove off, I ran up stairs to bed.

I remember awaking in the night, at the noise of a door closing very near to me, almost as if it were in my own room, and directly after hearing a sound as of carriage wheels on the road; but I was so drowsy and overcome with fatigue, that I took no notice of it, and fell asleep again directly.

In the morning, however, before I was up, Lady Mowbray's maid came to me, and asked leave to pass through my room to Miss Trevelyan's, as her door was locked, and she could not arouse her. Half asleep, half awake, I assented,

and the girl went in ; but returned immediately, saying that no one was there, and that the bed had not been slept in.

I was now thoroughly frightened, and sprang up instantly, as the maid exclaimed,—

“It is very strange ! Sir Wallace is not in my lady’s room this morning, I see. But her ladyship is asleep, and I do not dare to wake her. It’s very odd.”

Oh ! how sick at heart, and faint I felt ! The truth flashed upon my mind with a horrible conviction that left no room for hope or doubt ; and I sat down bewildered, as if stunned with a heavy blow.

In a very short time the whole house was up, and the frightful tale in everybody’s mouth. How poor Milly’s name was bandied about from one stranger to another ! And how cruelly she was judged ! The women, her companions and friends, trampled out her good name, now that she was fallen ; and so disgusted were they all, that they were eager to excuse themselves for ever having known her. No voices were raised on her behalf : none remembered her gentleness, her misery, and her suffering, but Mr. Bellair, Jane Aubrey, and her mother. Oh ! the vindictiveness of women against a fallen rival, is the bitterest thing on earth.

All was confusion ; that worst of confusion—the strife of scandalous and malicious tongues. Many

tales were told of the conduct of the guilty pair, of which, at least, one-half was utterly false; and the rest tortured into meanings and significance as much at variance with truth as malice could devise.

It was quite wonderful to hear how everybody had foreseen what had happened: how mothers had warned their daughters against too great an intimacy with the culprit, and how the young ladies had always thought her a "bold, forward creature." Some men, too, to whom Milly would never have condescended even to speak, except in a house where she was in some sort hostess, now smiled significantly, shrugging their shoulders, as if to imply an insolence they dared not utter; and others sneered scornfully.

All this seemed very strange to me then. But yesterday she had been the idol of these people, a model for the women, and a contested prize for the men, and now, within twelve hours, they all with one accord forsook and vilified her; denied their past allegiance, and made me forget her sin, grievous as it was, in their utter baseness. Oh, how indignant I felt!

Of all the people who now made loud and bitter outcry, magnifying Milly's crime, and maligning her past conduct, there was not one but had courted and flattered her—not one whom she had not served. But all was forgotten now: she was a

detected criminal; and for the discovery, *not* the sin, they forsook her.

And Lady Mowbray. Heaven forgive, if I wrong her! but I do believe that, as she had plotted for this most horrible catastrophe, so now she triumphed in its completion. The smile of a fiend was in her cold, gleaming eyes; and as she sat in her own room, receiving silently the condolence of her guests, there was an aspect and air about her quiet manner, which betrayed deep hate satisfied.

Why she so detested Milly, I never knew till after, when the whole dark secret was revealed by her maid and confidante; and that I may take leave of her ladyship for ever, I will give the woman's confession here.

When Lady Mowbray (then Agnes Davenport) was a girl of sixteen, at school in a large garrison town in the north of England, she had attracted the attention of a cavalry officer, who was stationed at the barracks.

By the assistance of her maid (at that time a servant in the school), she saw him daily; and what was only a flirtation to him, soon became a matter of life and death to her. With all the passion of a wild undisciplined mind, she loved her handsome admirer; who, worn out with excitement and thoroughly *blasé*, soon tired of her romance, and although she could not see it, only

amused himself with her devotion. To his prudence, and not to her own discretion, was she indebted for her escape from scandal.

When, after a year's sojourn at —, the regiment to which he belonged, left the town and went into other quarters, the shock of separation, which she had never seemed to anticipate, brought on a brain fever; and as soon as it was safe to do so, she was removed to her guardian's distant home. Here she pined for months, till, alarmed for her life, the old brewer sent her to London for medical advice.

Strangely enough, at the house of the friends to whose care she was consigned, she met again her soldier lover! It was not in human nature that he should escape being touched by the sight of her faded beauty and woe-worn features, so flattering to his vanity; and, under the impulse of pity and self-love, he renewed those attentions, the absence of which had already nearly destroyed her.

Thus matters went on, till, at the end of another year, they were secretly affianced: for he made it a condition of his condescension, that no one should be told of the engagement until he permitted it. Meanwhile, he returned to Sheffield, and Agnes to her guardian, without any one but her maid having an idea of the state of affairs.

In this way another year passed, her love in-

creasing and strengthening, and his dying utterly away. At last, six months before she first met Sir Wallace, she received a letter from her lover, breaking off, with many expressions of regret and self-accusation, "the unfortunate engagement into which he had hurried her." He entreated her to think no more of him, confessed with shame that his heart had never been interested, and that he could never excuse his treachery; but concluded with the information that he had met his fitting punishment by a recent refusal from the only woman whom he had ever loved.

Poor girl! all that had ever been good in her vanished from that day: her heart was hardened to all feeling but revenge, and she made a solemn vow to spend her life in discovering and persecuting to ruin, or death, the woman who, by captivating her lover, had unconsciously destroyed her peace.

In this spirit she married Sir Wallace, as she would have done any other man who had rank and freedom to offer her: both of which were necessary to the successful prosecution of her scheme of vengeance.

Unhappily for both, she discovered within a very few days after her marriage, that, although she possessed her husband's hand, his heart and affections had not accompanied it; and although she was more than indifferent herself, she resented

this as if she had been the most exemplary and affectionate of wives.

Smarting under a sense of this new wrong, she reached Mowbray, and there met, upon its very threshold, her unconscious rival both in her husband's heart and that of her former lover: and, to complete this chain of extraordinary circumstances, the faithless soldier was the only son of her near neighbours the Lancasters, to whom Milly had been known from infancy; while she had also been the choice and loved companion of her cousin's heart, from his schooldays!

Truth is indeed stranger than fiction! In life there are coincidences quite as extraordinary and rencontres as unlooked for, as in the most romantic story: we not unfrequently meet in our migrations with the very people we least expect, and least desire to fall in with. The facts of Milly's double rivalship of Lady Mowbray are no less true than strange.

In this unwelcome discovery, there was enough to have stung a gentle heart cruelly; but to one so proud, ruthless, and passionate as Lady Mowbray, no wonder it exasperated her to frenzy. Suffering, which exalts and purifies a noble nature, depraves and hardens those of baser kind; and the effort that Agnes Davenport made to conceal her emotions, and indulge her passion, induced dissimulation and craft.

She went about the work of ruin with a resolution and stealth which fiends might have envied. No compunction towards the wretched girl, round whom she was weaving her hideous net, ever visited her heart ; no compassion for the bereaved and miserable mother, whom she was thus dooming to misery and shame ; no womanly tenderness for the husband she was plotting to destroy ; not one relenting impulse or remorseful thought was suffered to delay or divert her purpose : she pursued a course of hard, bitter, cruel revenge, with vindictive tenacity of purpose, and that feeling of malignant satisfaction in others suffering, which makes men love and revel in the tortures they inflict.

CHAPTER II.

VERY few hours elapsed before Mowbray was deserted by the guests who had thronged it.

I was in my room packing trunks, and crying bitterly the while, when a message from Mrs. Trevelyan reached me, entreating that I would go to her. Trembling in every limb, and half stupified with fear and grief, I prepared to obey her summons; and after bathing my eyes, that I might look somewhat more composed, I went to her room.

I opened the door softly and fearfully; not that I fancied she was asleep, but because there is a solemnity in the presence of such deep sorrow as hers, which involuntarily subdues the spirits, and hushes all disturbing sounds.

"Come in—come in!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, sharply and impatiently; "come in, Florence!"

I entered. She was upon the bed, half lying, half bending forward, leaning upon both hands,

with her eyes fixed eagerly upon the door. When she saw me, she exclaimed,—

“Come here, Florence Sackville, and tell me what is this foul lie that they are saying of my child. What is this base false scandal that they dare to say of Milly?”

She spoke vehemently, almost furiously, in a tone of voice so new and strange to me, that, instead of answering, I was frightened into silence.

“Speak girl, speak!” she cried, seizing my hand with a convulsive grasp, and gazing into my face with a searching keenness, which, if I had meditated a falsehood, would have detected it in the utmost depths of the soul. “Speak : where is Milly?”

“I do not know,” I answered faintly.

“Not know! not know! It is false! I will not believe it. Such friends as you were, she would have gone nowhere without your knowledge. Not know! what do you *think*?”

I could not speak ; for the anguish in her face distracted me : and I *dared* not tell her the truth. Overcome by my feelings, I sank down by the bed, and hiding my face in the clothes, burst into tears.

“Florence ! Florence !” cried the poor mother, in tones of such misery, that I shuddered as I knelt, “what is all this? It is not true what

they have been saying ; speak—speak ! it is not true ?”

“ Oh ! do not ask me ! pray—pray, do not ask me !”

“ But I must, Florence. The truth must be spoken at all times, and I do think that from you I shall hear it : I expect it—so I ask you again, and come what may, I will have an answer. Where is my daughter, Milly ?”

“ Gone !” I sobbed out.

“ Where ? with whom ?” she asked, fiercely.

“ I do not know ; but I fear with her cousin.”

“ No ! no ! it cannot be. Do not you say so, Florence : do not *you* say so !”

Again, I could make no answer, but my tears ; and soon she asked in a faint voice,—

“ Why do you say so ? *You* would not judge her hardly ? why do you think so ?”

Her failing voice made me look up, and I saw that she was fainting. In a moment I sprang to my feet, laid her tenderly down, and with cold water and eau-de-Cologne, both of which stood close by, bathed her temples until she revived. My tears mingled plentifully with the water I was using, for I knew that the deathblow had been struck ; and my heart bled for Milly’s despair when she should learn this consequence of her crime.

In a very short time the eyes of the sufferer unclosed, and in a feeble voice, not louder than a

whisper, she bade me tell her all I knew and feared.

How I obeyed, I do not know. I would gladly have hidden the evil tale in my heart for ever ; but I had no choice, and, in as few words as I could, I told her all.

"And that note," she said when I had finished, alluding to the one I had picked up the day before, "what is it ? where is it ?"

"I do not know ; for, of course, I did not read it : but it is here."

"Give it to me."

I did so ; but in a minute she returned it, saying, "I cannot see : read it to me. Whose writing is it ?"

"Sir Wallace's."

"Go on."

"To-night after the ball, change your dress quickly for a plain dark one, and come to the French window in the library, nearest the lake. I will be there. I have secured proper people with a carriage, to be waiting below the great gates. They are perfect strangers, and have no idea who I am ; therefore do not fear, dearest, dearest Milly ! but trust in me now and for ever, and come boldly."

A cold shudder ran through me as I read this note, and thought of what a different day this might have been, had I chanced to read it twelve hours earlier.

For a long, long time after this, Mrs. Trevelyan lay without speaking; her eyes closed and her hands clasped, as if she were insensible: but when I moved and bent over her, she looked up and motioned me to close the blinds.

Again she was silent; but after a time, to my great astonishment, she rose slowly from her bed, and crossing the room unaided (a thing she had not done for years), went to a writing-table at the opposite side, and sat down.

I stood still, gazing at her with frightened amazement; for I should scarcely have been more surprised if I had seen the bed she had left, rise up and walk. When she was seated she beckoned to me, and asked solemnly,—

“Florence Sackville, do you from your very heart, as answering unto God, believe my child to be guilty?”

“I have told you all I know,” I answered, evasively.

“That is a subterfuge, and no reply,” she rejoined. “It cannot cost you more to answer, than it does me to ask; but, be the pain to both what it may, I must have an answer.”

“Then I do believe it.”

“That she has sought and lured this man from his duty?”

“No, no, no!” I replied, vehemently. “She has been the victim, not the tempter. She has

been tortured, taunted, worn out with petty insults and malice, till she has been all but maddened. She has been persecuted and harassed, thrown upon him at all times, *forced* into his society, left to hear from him the only words of sympathy and kindness that were ever spoken; and no wonder that, at last, so hemmed in on every side, she rushed from misery into ruin."

"And was this indeed so? Is she but the sacrifice to a profligate's deep-laid scheme?"

"No!" I answered passionately, for all discretion and thought of consequences was gone, and I spoke recklessly.

"No! bad as Sir Wallace is, the plot was not his. His was no plan, I do believe: he has himself been entangled in a net woven by another. He is a selfish, unprincipled, and self-indulgent man; but, until he says so, I will never believe that he plotted for poor Milly's destruction. A snare was laid for both—for what diabolical reason I cannot tell—and he saw it; but he only aided it in so far that he did not avoid it."

"Who, then, do you speak of? Who else had power to plot and persecute her?"

"His wife, Lady Mowbray."

"Are you mad, girl, to say this?" cried Mrs. Trevelyan, sternly. "Have these horrors turned your brain, that you say such things?"

"No; I am in my clear full senses. And I

believe what I have said, as firmly as I do my own existence."

"And yet you all stood by and saw this fiendish thing done, and said nothing!"

"Pardon me! I warned and besought Milly to avoid the net that was being woven round her. I prayed and urged her, almost beyond what was delicate and fitting; but she silenced me indignantly, relying upon her own courage and purity of intention. What could I do more?"

"You should have told me, her natural and faithful protector."

"She forbade me: and prayed so earnestly that I would never reveal to you what she suffered, that in sympathy for her apprehensions lest you should suffer too, I could not but obey her.

"Lest I should suffer! my poor lost child! did she so feel for me? Did she, indeed, remember me?" cried the distracted mother; and she bent her head and wept.

After a while she recovered her serenity, and said,—

"I have much to do, and fain would ask your help to do it; for I must leave this place at once. Beneath this roof I will not, so it please God, sleep another night. But I must be alone for a time, having many things to think of: so go now, and return presently.

"First, tell me again if all that you have told

He was the first to see the light of day in the world. He was the first to see the light of day in the world.

"He was the first to see the light of day in the world. He was the first to see the light of day in the world."

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At last I heard the turret clock strike two, and thinking Mrs. Trevelyan must now be ready, I returned to the house, and went up stairs.

When I reached the gallery, I was thunder-struck at distinguishing Mrs. Trevelyan's voice, speaking, in clear deep tones, from Lady Mowbray's dressing-room; and, with a sudden impulse for which I cannot account, I went hastily forward, and pushing open the door, that already stood ajar, entered the room.

Before me, leaning with one hand upon the table, and with the other grasping a chair—white as a marble statue, but shaking in every limb, stood Lady Mowbray; her eyes staring wide and wonderingly upon her accuser. Opposite was Mrs. Trevelyan, firm and unshaken, as if endued with superhuman strength. Her right arm was slightly extended towards her enemy, and her countenance expressed more scornful detestation than I could have believed it possible for human features to portray.

She was speaking when I entered; and, although Lady Mowbray uttered an exclamation at seeing me, Mrs. Trevelyan never noticed my appearance by a word or glance, but went on without a pause.

“And you thought, short sighted as you are, that your share in this most fiendish deed would have remained unknown! that you had played your

part so warily as to baffle detection by human means! But you forgot those All-seeing eyes which never sleep; that keep eternal watch to bring dark mysteries to light. You forgot that, to be safe from treachery, it is needful to be innocent.

“The sins of all your guilty life I know: the plots with which, step by step, you have tortured and decoyed my child’s soul to ruin. But I will not curse you. I leave you to your own conscience and to God! Scorned, despised, and avoided by all but the vilest, you will drag on your weary life alone, and end it without blessing or respect.

“The blighted face of her you have destroyed, will haunt you, sleeping and waking, from this hour until your death. Try as you may, you will never escape from it: it will glare upon you from the garden flowers, as from the churchyard grave. Peace and you have taken leave of each other for ever: you will never know it again on earth; for guilt, like the ocean, can have no rest.

“I am now leaving this house for ever, driven from the roof of my ancestors by your heartless perfidy and cruelty. Wanderers on the face of the earth, heartbroken and wicked, have you driven forth those, into whose home you were welcomed and received. May we never meet again in this world! and may God in His infinite

mercy look down and save from everlasting destruction, those whom you have betrayed and sacrificed ; so that when we stand together at the eternal bar, I may not have to call upon the Judge of all, for vengeance against you for my child's lost soul !”

On uttering these words, the wretched mother turned to leave the room ; but, as she did so, her eyes fell upon a portrait of Milly, which hung over the door. At the sight of it, all her firmness gave way ; and after a paroxysm of passionate weeping, she cried out in a transport of anguish, stretching out her arms to the picture,—

“ My child ! my darling, darling child ! Where are you ? If you are upon the earth, speak and deny this horrible crime ! Or, if they have killed you with the slander, appeal with me to the righteous Judge of heaven to right you. Oh, Milly ! Milly ! by the love and prayers of twenty long years, I implore you come back—if but for a moment—and speak to me. Milly ! Milly !”

She fell upon her knees, with her eyes riveted on the portrait, as if she thought that it lived and could answer her.

“ If you would not have me die here, speak ! speak ! Do not turn your eyes away, my child ! What secret is there, that your mother should not read ? Why are they averted from me ? those dear eyes that were so innocent and true. Great

Heaven ! what does this mean ? Her face is pale and turned away ! her eyelids quiver and her lips part ! Oh, Father of mercy ! I ask for proof of my child's innocence, and the canvass speaks and cries out guilt !”

As Mrs. Trevelyan uttered these despairing words, her arms, which till now had been extended imploringly to the picture, wavered in the air, then fell suddenly by her side, and, before I could support her tottering frame, she sank at our feet.

She was instantly raised, and carried back to her own room ; but scarcely had we succeeded in replacing her in bed, when violent convulsions came on, which, to our terrified and inexperienced eyes, threatened instant death.

Happily, however, the village surgeon, a clever though eccentric practitioner, was speedily in attendance ; and, under his able treatment, the sufferer's tortured frame at last recovered its usual appearance.

CHAPTER III.

As soon as Mrs. Trevelyan was in a state to be safely left to the care of a servant, Mr. Stuart beckoned me from the room, and, leading the way into an adjoining one, closed the door carefully and asked,—

“What is all this about? How on earth comes Mrs. Trevelyan in this state?”

I hesitated, doubtful what to say; and he continued impatiently,—

“Pshaw! I thought you had more sense than to make a mystery where there is none! This is a waste of time. Do you really fancy, young lady, that the miserable occurrences which have taken place in this house during the last twelve hours, are not already known and talked about over half the county? If you do, you are most grievously mistaken. It’s not that, I want to know; if it were, I need only go outside those gates, and ask the first man, woman, or child I met, for a full explanation. No; what I want to

learn is, what immediate act of villany or folly has reduced Mrs. Trevelyan to the condition in which I find her. Surely, in her precarious state, no one has been base enough to tell her the truth, eh?"

"How she heard it, in the first instance, I do not know; but in some way or other she has become acquainted with the whole story."

"Impossible! what fiend or fool could tell her?"

"I cannot tell; and, indeed, I have not the slightest idea: perhaps one of the house-maids."

"Likely enough! It's precisely the sort of thing one expects from these chattering broomsticks: they are a most pestilent set. But I think, from what you said in the room just now, that you know something more of the immediate cause of Mrs. Trevelyan's seizure, than you have told me yet. What was that you said about a picture?"

"Simply that Mrs. Trevelyan had been painfully excited by seeing a portrait of her daughter, and had fallen into a state of insensibility before it."

"Sad, very sad! whose wise doing was that?"

"Her own, I imagine: I was not in the house at the time she went into Lady Mowbray's room; and only reached it a few minutes before she fainted."

"How did she get there? To the best of my belief, she has not walked unassisted for years."

"That, too, I cannot explain. I only know that early this morning I saw her rise unaided from her bed, and cross the room without the slightest support."

"Poor soul! poor soul! She will never rise again, I fear: the last hour of her life is rapidly approaching."

"Oh, do not say so! It will kill Milly to know that she has destroyed her mother; for, indeed, she loved her devotedly."

"So it appears," said the surgeon, drily.

"You do not believe me. And I do not wonder," I replied, impetuously. "Everything is against her; and I cannot expect indifferent people to credit a feeling which her actions seem to contradict. Nevertheless, what I say is true: never child loved a parent, more than Milly does her mother; and, maddened as she now is by suffering, the knowledge of Mrs. Trevelyan's death, caused by her sin, will be followed by her own. Thus this horrible tragedy will be consummated."

"Hem!" coughed the doctor, contemptuously.


I turned away angrily, for I was strongly excited; and the sight of another's calm indifference and scarcely courteous incredulity, was more than I could endure.

Nothing is more exasperating than to have one's whole heart, with its warmest hopes and fears, laid bare to the careless observation, and cold, unsympathizing scrutiny of a worldly-wise person, who looks upon the excitement he cannot understand, as a sort of ridiculous insanity.

It is certainly not true, that intense and passionate emotion awakens a corresponding sympathy in others. On the contrary, it frequently happens that we plead, deprecate, entreat, or scorn, evincing real and, perhaps, agonized sincerity, yet find, after all, that we might as well have addressed a rock.

It is said that the whole secret of success lies in being in earnest. That is truth, but only half a truth: it is true as regards our own success in life, its studies and enterprises, but only partially so, as regards our influence over others. Else how could the great, the powerful, and the wealthy listen unmoved, to the despairing petitions they reject? No, if we are to influence others by the reality of our feelings, whether sufferings or joys, it must be, not by our own sincerity, but through the fortunate chance of awakening a corresponding remembrance of similar emotion in our hearer's mind.

Full of wrath, I walked angrily to the window and looked out.



"Who is going to nurse Mrs. Trevelyan?" inquired Mr. Stuart.

"I don't know," I answered, shortly.

"Of course not! That is always the way with you very enthusiastic people. You all talk very well, but as for doing anything rational, that is quite out of the question."

I did not reply, for I was too angry to trust myself with words; therefore, with unusual wisdom, I remained silent, while he continued,—

"I must see some one to whom I can give directions. Who is it to be?"

"I really cannot advise."

"Very well; then, I may as well say good-morning: it is quite useless wasting my time in a house where there is no one to leave a message with."

As he spoke, he crossed the room to the door; but he had not reached it, when my conscience smote me for my selfish indifference to the sufferer, and I said,—

"I will take your message, if you can trust me."

"As you like; only, if you undertake it, be good enough not to excite yourself."

With these contemptuous words, he sat down and wrote a long prescription; he then gave me some very clear and sensible directions, and, promising to return in three hours, left the house.

brought to me. When Mrs. Trevelyan saw it, the gleam of hope brightened and lighted up her sunken eyes with new life; but it was destined to fade away in disappointment. I said as quickly as I could,—

“It is from Ingerdyne; from my mother.” Oh, the misery of the deep sigh which answered me! It was heart-rending.

My mother’s letter was brief and angry; chiding me for remaining so long, and bidding me return without delay.

“What does Mrs. Sackville say?” asked the sufferer, anxiously, for she saw by my countenance that my letter was a painful one. “I hope she is not ill.”

“Oh, no; but—” I hesitated to tell the ungracious truth,—“she wishes me to return home; I fancy that she wants me to see some one who is expected at Ingerdyne—and I have been away so much this summer,” I added, apologetically.

“But a few days longer, Florence! I shall not be here more—a very few days! Surely she will spare you that little while, to close my eyes.”

“I will ask, certainly,” I replied; “not for the sad purpose you fear, but that I may add some little to your comfort.”

“God bless you, Florence!” said Mrs. Trevelyan, solemnly. “A forsaken mother’s bless-

ing be on you now and ever! As you have ministered to me in my desolation, so shall you, at your need, be ministered unto."

I was powerfully excited; and bodily fatigue, added to the many and painful emotions I had lately endured, seemed to have utterly unnerved me. As she spoke, my head sank upon the bed, and I wept unrestrainedly.

While we remained in this state, Mr. Stuart entered; and, after congratulating his patient upon the improvement in her symptoms, insisted upon knowing what was the matter with me.

"Nothing," I replied, thanklessly; for I had not forgiven him for his words and manner the day before.

"Nothing! That's a regular young lady's ailment. Then what do you cry about it for? Is 'nothing' enough to send you down upon your knees, and swell your eyes out of your head, and turn your face like the cook's, eh? 'Nothing,' indeed! Such 'nothings' help to fill the churchyard."

"She has received a summons from home," explained the invalid.

"Eh? What?" cried the little man, turning round like a teetotum. "Summoned home! And you call that *nothing*? In the name of common sense! if you call leaving a dying woman without a nurse or friend, nothing,—what do you think

worth calling *something*? Eh, Miss Sackville, eh?"

I don't know what possessed me that day, unless it was the weakness of overfatigue; but at these words, like a simpleton, I burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears.

"Crying again! crying again!" exclaimed the Doctor. "God bless me! what is there to cry for? Is this a part of the 'nothing,' or have you begun to find out that it is a more serious thing than you took it for? I can't understand such contradictions at all. Pray, young lady, what is it you want? To go home, or not?"

"She wishes to stay with me," said Mrs. Trevelyan, gently: "but she is not her own mistress, and must write home to obtain permission."

"*Write* home! My dear good lady, what a woman's idea of doing business that is! If you want a thing *done*, go; if you want it refused, write."

"I fear that if Florence went, her mother might be still more unwilling to part with her."

"Very likely. But can nobody else go? Where is her home?"

"At Ingerdyne, three miles from——"

"Ingerdyne! Ingerdyne!" cried Mr. Stuart, who had a great habit of repeating the last words of other people's speeches. "Are you any relation to the late Mr. Vere?"

"Only his grand-daughter," I answered, coolly.

"Is it possible? Daughter of his daughter, of course. What a remarkable thing! And you wish to stay and nurse Mrs. Trevelyan? So you shall. I'll go over to Ingerdyne myself.

"Bless me! it is thirty years since I was there. How everything must be changed! Still I'll go, and bring you back the leave you want; so write a note to your mother to say what you require, and you shall have an answer before midnight."

Perfectly amazed at the vehemence of the little Doctor, I stood for a moment gazing at him, with wonder, and some faint suspicion that he had lost his senses; but in a minute, he said,—

"You are puzzled, I see, and curious. All women are; and I know it's hopeless to expect anything to be properly done, while you are in that state. You want to learn what I know of Ingerdyne and your late grandfather, to excite me to ride forty miles on an errand for you, at a moment's notice: well, I'll tell you.

"Many, many years ago, my father, whose unhappy propensity for gambling led him at times into very evil company, became possessed of a cheque signed in Mr. Vere's name; which, when he presented it for payment at the banker's, was discovered to be a forgery. It was in vain that he protested his innocence of any guilty knowledge, or part in the forgery; as he refused to give the name of

the man from whom he had received it, he was of course arrested.

“I was then a boy of little more than twelve years of age; but I remember every circumstance of that horrible time, when the news first came to our home, as well as if it had happened yesterday.

My mother was frantic with grief and shame, and taking me with her to the prison where my father lay, implored him, on her knees, to tell her from whom he had received the fatal paper. He refused: and although she was convinced of his integrity, no one else was; and the fearful preparations for his trial went on.

“I well recollect my mother’s state of alternate despair and frenzy, during the period which elapsed from the time of her husband’s arrest, until the day she resolved to see Mr. Vere. I was with her the whole time. I never left her day or night; for I was her only child then, and, young as I was, she clung to me as to her sole consolation.

“It was at night that the idea of moving Mr. Vere to mercy, first occurred to her; and she aroused me from the little bed upon which I slept beside her, bidding me rise and come with her instantly. At first I was frightened, thinking that sorrow had affected her intellects; but as soon as she discovered the fears which kept me aloof gazing at her, she sat quietly down, and in a few

words told me her plan and her hopes. I acquiesced in both—as what else, so young as I was, could I do?—and we set off from London. We had very little money; for, although my father's practice at the bar had been a profitable one, yet the small income he allowed my mother for her household expenses had been almost entirely forestalled. However, between walking and riding, we reached Ingerdyne at last.

“My heart sank as we were ushered into a large library, and were desired to wait for Mr. Vere's arrival. It was a noble room; I had never seen anything so well appointed before; but I only gazed round a moment, and taking my mother's cold hand in mine, held it tight, fixing my eyes upon her pale face.

“She returned the caress fondly; but neither of us spoke: we had lost courage even to break the silence, by the sound of our own voices. At last, tired I suppose of the stillness, a parrot, which we had not noticed, said, suddenly,—

“‘Good-morning! You're welcome! Take a chair.’

“My mother started to her feet. The tones were so human, that she fancied they were those of some member of the family; and only when they were repeated, with the peculiar chuckle of the bird, did she discover whence the voice came. Like you just now, young lady; for no cause that

I could understand, my mother burst into tears, calling the poor silly parrot's words an omen ; and, while I was vainly trying to comfort her, Mr. Vere entered.

“ My mother was, even at this time, although so crushed with grief and woe, both beautiful in face and graceful in manner ; and your grandfather was instantly prepossessed in her favour. In a very little time his courteous attention restored her to composure ; and, in a more collected manner than she had spoken for weeks, she told her errand, and begged for mercy for her husband.

“ When she first commenced her story, and at the mention of her name, Mr. Vere's brow grew dark, and he frowned ominously ; but at last, moved by her agony, and impressed by her perfect confidence in her husband's integrity, the angry look relaxed, and he began to listen favourably.

“ ‘ It is a very large sum of money to lose, and a heinous crime to pardon,’ I remember, he said.

“ ‘ It is,’ replied my mother ; ‘ but large as it is, were it a thousand times told, it could not compensate, either to you or me, for the loss of an innocent life. And the crime is *so* heinous, that you should be very certain that you are right, before you fix its stigma upon the name of

a man who solemnly denies it. Remember that in a few days, all the proofs of innocence that the world can offer, will be useless.'

" 'I will see your husband, and for the sake of your sorrow, and your boy's future respectability, promise that, if he will tell me in confidence from whom he received the cheque, I will pledge myself to take no further steps in the matter: I will not only save him, but let the guilty escape. I really can and ought to do no more.'

" 'Then there is no hope!' exclaimed my mother, mournfully, 'for he never broke his word when once given, and I know that he would sooner die ten deaths, than save his life by what he will consider an act of dishonour.'

" 'Are you sure of that?' asked Mr. Vere, eagerly. 'Can a gambler have any such sense of honour left?'

" 'Yes! I would stake my existence upon his integrity and good faith. He is as innocent of this crime as I am; but I know he will never preserve his life at the expense of his word.'

" 'Then I will save him!' said Mr. Vere, impetuously. 'If you are right, he ought not to be cut off, without an opportunity of reform; if you are wrong, the consequences of your mistake will fall more heavily upon you than upon any one else.'

" 'I can't tell what followed this, exactly; for my

poor mother, after a woman's usual fashion, went into hysterics as soon as she had attained her wishes; and I was too bewildered with contending feelings, to know at all clearly, what passed afterwards.

"Your good old grandfather was true to his word. When the day of trial came, there was neither prosecutor nor evidence forthcoming; and the accused was of course discharged.

"An interview took place immediately between my father and Mr. Vere, and so strongly was the latter impressed with a belief of the barrister's innocence, that he offered him such assistance as enabled him to leave England, and study the medical profession under a feigned name, in Germany.

"Several years afterwards, a man condemned to death for forgery upon a northern bank, confessed the day before his execution, that among many similar frauds which he had committed, was the very cheque which my father had been accused of forging. It was now proved to have reached his hands through those of another dupe; who, like himself, had been wholly innocent of any guilty knowledge.

"The first intelligence which reached us of this happy discovery, was brought to us by Mr. Vere himself; who travelled to Brussels for the express purpose. His joy was scarcely less than ours; but

all his entreaties to my father to return to England were unavailing. During our exile my father had, as a physician, prospered greatly; his family too was much increased, and, as he had none but painful remembrances attached to the land of his birth, he preferred remaining where he was.

"Before his death, however, I came to England, and purchased my practice here; which I have followed ten years, without knowing, until this day, how near I am to Ingerdyne.

"You understand now, why I should like to serve Mr. Vere's grand-daughter, even in a whim; and perhaps will tell me, if I am likely to succeed?"

"Only tell my mother what you have just told us, and I am sure you are. She never refuses anything asked in her father's name."

"Then make haste; say as little as you can in your note, and have it ready by the time I return, which will be exactly in a quarter of an hour from this minute: it is half-past one now; I shall be here at a quarter to two."

Precisely at the time he had fixed, Mr. Stuart opened the door of Mrs. Trevelyan's room. Seeing the note in my hand, he gave a little nod of approbation, then walked up to the patient's bed, felt her pulse, asked one or two questions, repeated twice over to me a few plain directions—particularly cautioning me against allowing

either visitors or excitement—and then took his leave.

Fortunately Mrs. Trevelyan slept nearly the whole of the afternoon and evening; so that, relieved from attendance, I was enabled to lie down upon a sofa close to the bed and sleep too. Towards midnight, however, she became restless, and at times delirious, fancying she saw Milly; while I, at that time, unused to a sick-room, and the variations of disease, grew wretchedly nervous and frightened.

At length, to my great relief, I heard the hall bell ring, and in a few minutes after, the little Doctor made his appearance in the room. The sound of the opening and closing door, aroused the patient instantly; and with a wild burst of hysterical laughter, which thrilled through us all with its unnatural sound, she greeted Mr. Stuart's entrance.

"Bad! bad! very bad, indeed!" he said to himself, while watching the poor sufferer's convulsed features lighted up with the horrible glare of delirium.

"What has she been doing? who has seen or spoken to her, since I left this morning?"

"No one, but Jane and myself. She slept until nine o'clock, and ever since has been at intervals as you see. I have never left the room since I gave you my note to-day."

“Ah! that’s right! I don’t want you to do much; only to see that others do their duty. And now, while I attend to my patient, do you read this note from your mother.”

I did so: it conveyed a permission to stay at Mowbray for a few days more, if my services were *absolutely necessary* to Mrs. Trevelyan; but the hour they became otherwise, I was to return.

CHAPTER IV.

DURING all this distressing time, Lady Mowbray never visited the room ; nor had I, since the first morning, asked a single question respecting her. By the deathbed of her victim, how could I care for the traitress whose machinations had resulted thus ?

The faculties and strength of the poor suffering mother were completely overpowered : and in a state of convulsion and delirium, alternating with stupor, Mrs. Trevelyan passed three long heavy days.

On the fourth, there was a great, and to me hopeful change : memory and resignation returned, the pain of which the patient had at first complained was gone, and the features lost their mournful and anxious look. In great delight I remarked upon this improvement to Mr. Stuart, but he only shook his head, muttering,—

“ A short rest before an eternal one ! ”

That evening, when we were quite alone, Mrs.

Trevelyan said to me, in the sweet quiet tones of old,—

“Draw up the blinds, Florence, and tie back the curtains; I wish to see the sun set: I have a strong impression that I shall never look upon the scene again.”

I obeyed, and as the blinds were rolled up, a flood of ruddy golden sunlight fell upon the sufferer's pallid face, investing it with an unearthly and solemn radiance.

In a large mirror nearly opposite her bed, Mrs. Trevelyan's eye caught the reflection of her figure, and its glorious halo; which, with a peculiar smile, she pointed out to me, saying,—

“In olden times they would have called that an omen.”

“Of what?” I asked.

“A speedy and happy release from sorrow.”

“Then pray let us follow the example. You are so much better to-night, that I think we may very reasonably hope the omen will be soon fulfilled.”

“Not on earth, Florence! In this world there is no exemption from sorrow. It is only when, dying in the faith of Christ, we shake off our mortality, that we escape suffering. But even so, I dare to hope that I shall be soon at rest. My life, like this long painful day, is closing fast.”

“You should not say so: you are weak and

fanciful, or you would know how much better you are to-night.

"I am sorry you think so, Florence, because you are preparing for yourself a great disappointment. Believe one who has been watching the approach of death for ten years, that but a very few hours now lie between her and his actual presence."

I could make no reply; for her voice, so hollow and sweet, lent a sad impressiveness to her words, and forced upon me the belief, that they were prophetic.

"Do not grieve, Florence!" she said tenderly; "rather rejoice that, from a world which could now be to me nothing but a scene of shame and grief, God in his abundant mercy is taking me so soon. I feel quite strong to-night: unusually so; and I think it is a strength lent to me for some great purpose, although as yet I know not what. But while it remains with me, I wish to thank you with all my power for the watchful, untiring, and loving care you have bestowed upon me.

"Do not interrupt me: I know what you would say; but until you are as desolate, heart-crushed, and bereaved as I am, you can never appreciate the comfort your presence has been. Still, although the benefit has been priceless to me, I trust that in rendering it, you will be profited also.

"You are young, ardent, and enthusiastic; full of the gaiety of life and health; and it may be well that, for a time, you should be called from the enjoyments of existence to look upon a death-bed. You are handsome and attractive, gifted with more than usual talents, and entrusted by God with generous and noble impulses: be careful how you use them. They are great blessings, but they are great temptations also: you have seen them all possessed by one, whose early education should have taught her how to watch and control them, and you have seen her fall.

"Oh, Florence! if she, once so gentle, humble, and truthful; so guarded and prayed for; so tenderly loved, and religiously educated, could fall from virtue and holiness, do you take heed! The purest, truest heart on earth, cannot be more innocent and guileless than my unhappy child's was, a few brief months since; and even now, when the near approach of death enlarges and clears all moral perceptions, enabling us to see vice unmasked, in all its monstrous and hideous proportions—even now, I do believe that her crime is less guilt than madness; and that, purified by chastisement and penitence on earth, I shall yet meet her in heaven."

"And from my heart I believe it too," I answered fervently.

"May God, in His abundant mercy and com-

passion, grant it to my prayers!" rejoined the mother, solemnly.

"And now, Florence," she resumed, after a short silence, "I wish to leave in your charge a message to my poor lost child. I implore you to find some means of delivering it to her, when I am gone. Will you?"

"If it is possible, I will. I may not be able to discover her very soon, but I promise you that no effort shall be left untried to do so, as speedily as can be: sooner or later, if she and I live, she shall have your message faithfully."

As I spoke, Mrs. Trevelyan's eyes, which had been fixed upon my face, as if there to discover the sincerity of my promise, closed. Her lips moved as if in prayer, and for many minutes she was silent.

Then, turning towards me, she pointed to a dressing-case upon the table, and bade me take from it two small miniatures. When I had done so, and given them to her, she opened the cases, and gazed long and tearfully at the portraits: then returning them to me, she said,—

"Give these, with my blessing, to my child. Tell her they are the resemblances of her dead parents; and bid her, from the dying lips of the last surviving one, to repent—earnestly and at once—as she hopes to meet them again in heaven.

“Tell her, that with my last breath I prayed for her pardon to Almighty God; and, with a firm hope and belief that she would seek His mercy by immediate penitence and humiliation before Him, I left her my blessing. Tell her, that, by the memory of her early and innocent life, I implored her to reflect upon the awful course she is pursuing.

“Oh, Florence! plead with her, in my name, as you would for your own soul, that she will pause at once; and that, with God to help her, she will, even at the sacrifice of all she now holds dearest, repent and return to the path of virtue she has left. Warn her that vice never brings happiness, that peace can only be found in the ways of righteousness; and entreat her, as she hopes for mercy beyond the grave, to listen to the voice which, through you, speaks from the dead.

“It may be, Florence, that you will see her but once; that upon that one interview will rest her fate for ever: think of this when the time comes, and remember how much depends upon your energy and zeal. It may be the last opportunity vouchsafed to her by God. Promise me, that you will exert every power you possess to improve it to the utmost—that you will spare no remonstrance or entreaty to save her.”

“I do promise, with all my soul!”

“Do not be repulsed by careless words or angry looks. Do not be offended at slights or

even affront, but persevere to the end. Remember that the unjust judge yielded to pertinacity what he denied to justice : so do you have courage and persist, looking to your reward hereafter. Will you, Florence, undertake this most solemn charge ?”

“ I will ; and, with God’s help, perform it honestly.”

“ Do not be too stern with her, Florence,” said the poor mother, in a voice now choked with tears : “ she is of a gentle, tender spirit, and would die under a rude hand. She has been so cherished and beloved, that what less sensitive natures would never feel at all, will crush her utterly.

“ When she hears that I have passed away, her conscience will upbraid her ; she will forget the health broken for years, and with a merciless remorse will accuse herself of my death. Save her from that misery : tell her, that to the last I loved and blessed her, and that I died in the firm belief that her penitence would reunite us. Tell her, that never have I thought harshly of her, but sorrowfully, and with unabated affection ; and when her heart is touched with that assurance, and softened by remembrance of old days with all their holy memories, then speak to her gently and lovingly of repentance.

“ To you, as to a sister, I confide her ; and as

you would have others keep faith with you, do you fulfil the charge I now bequeath to you—mercifully and lovingly, yet fearlessly.”

“Do not doubt me. If I live, I will do your bidding; if I die, I will leave it in good hands.”

“I am satisfied. And now, Florence, read to me the seventeenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel. I am weary, and would fain be at rest.”

After a short time, the faint regular breathing of the sleeper warned me to close my book; and I leaned back in the large invalid chair, watching the gathering twilight, and thinking of the responsibility I had just undertaken.

Before night had quite set in, Mr. Stuart came noiselessly into the room, and, beckoning me to be silent, gently lifted up the patient’s wan white hand, and felt her pulse. There was still light enough left to show how pale and drawn her features were; and, with a half sigh, the Doctor turned from the bed, and going to the door motioned to me to follow him.

“Who sits up with you to-night?” he asked, abruptly.

“No one. I have arranged to have a bed made upon the sofa for myself; and, as Mrs. Trevelyan is so much better, I shall do very well alone.”

“She is *not* better. Haven’t you heard the

old woman's tale of people's senses returning to them just before death? She is as much better as that; no more."

"But she is so quiet; so rational and collected; so different to what she was yesterday and the day before. She cannot surely be so near death!"

"Those are all so many proofs that she is. Her pulse has sunk fatally, and her face is gathered into the lines which are never seen upon the cheeks and mouth of the living, until the last. Death has set his seal upon her."

I staggered, and should have fallen against the gallery baluster, but for Mr. Stuart's arm, which he extended to save me, saying, at the same time,—"Are you frightened, that you tremble so? I told you from the first that she could not recover?"

"Yes, yes; but I did not think it was to be so soon—so very, very soon. She has not been ill a week."

"You calculate by an original almanack, I imagine, Miss Sackville. I have attended her myself for five years; and she descended to me from my deceased partner, whose patient she has been for at least ten. She has long been in such a state as to place her life in immediate danger from any sudden shock she might receive; and surely the blows she has experienced lately would have been sufficient to destroy even a stronger

person. My only astonishment is, that she has lasted so long. It is wonderful what women can bear!"

"Then you think there is no hope?" I asked, mournfully.

"None," he answered decidedly. "Nor can anything more be done. The only service she is now capable of receiving, is that most difficult one of all for friends to render—the mercy of being *let alone*. Attention will only disturb her; and any attempt to invigorate or restore her, will be both useless and cruel."

"What, then, do you wish me to do?"

"Nothing. Lie quietly on the sofa, as you proposed, and have some steady person in the room in case Mrs. Trevelyan is worse—some one who is collected and silent: a deaf and dumb person would be just the thing, if you had such a treasure."

"There is no one in the house whom I could trust; and after what you have said, indeed, I dare not be alone. I must have some one with me, or I cannot stay in the room."

"Nonsense! Nonsense! What is there to fear? But if you really have nobody who is to be depended upon to keep the room quiet (and there will be nothing else to be done to-night), I will send you a nurse of my own training, upon whom I can rely. Would you like it?"

"Oh, yes! But do you really think there is any immediate danger—to-night, I mean?"

"No: it is possible, but I do not expect it; though it is right that you should be prepared. I will give the nurse all needful directions, and do you go to bed quietly, as you suggested. You will not be wanted, and will be better asleep."

In about an hour the woman arrived; and a perfect pattern she was of a model nurse. She was short, fat, and red faced, and attired in a black silk gown, white apron, and a tremendous cap.

The instant she came into the room, she began to set it to rights; that is, she put everything out of its place, arranging all the articles upon the toilette, writing-table, and sofa, in the most extraordinary and out of the way positions. Every towel and basket cover she unwrapped and folded up afresh. She put every chair in a new situation; and every book she opened and carefully removed to a different locality: in short, before she had been half an hour in the room, she had made it most particularly uncomfortable; having rendered it almost impossible to find anything that was wanted.

After everything had been disarranged to her perfect satisfaction, and she had demolished the whole of the eatables upon a well furnished sup-

per-tray, she drew a large chair to the side of the bed, added two more (much in the same fashion that children do, when they make coaches), and, with a whisper to me that she should be sure to hear if the "poor dear" stirred, she doffed her lace cap for a calico one with portentous borders, and resigned herself to sleep.

In a little while the breathing of the sleepers was the only sound that broke the stillness, and I sat mournfully alone; every now and then wondering, in the midst of gloomy thoughts and sad anticipations, what earthly good this fat fidgety nurse had done, or was expected to do. If she had come to relieve me, certainly she had not fulfilled her mission; for the sole use she was of at present, was to keep me awake by her snoring.

However, as even that was preferable to her conversation, I resigned myself as well as I could to the prospect of another night's watching; and tried to occupy myself with reading.

But of this I soon tired, for I could not fix my attention to the book: my thoughts were wandering far away, and at last I closed the volume, and allowed them full liberty.

Oh, what a solemn, dreary night that was! even now, I can close my eyes and bring the whole scene before me.

The room was very large, and, like many

others in the house, was wainscoted with oak. Several of the pannels were filled by grim, black-looking portraits of the old Mowbrays; and in all possible places large mirrors were let into the walls, reflecting the stern faces of their late owners. The bed was immense; almost as wide and long as a small room; it was draped with tapestry, representing a boar hunt in a royal forest, and at the head, immediately behind the pillows, was worked in bright colours, the death and flowing blood of the animal. Upon a centre table, well shaded from the sleeper's eyes, burned a candle, which just lighted the room sufficiently to magnify its proportions mysteriously, and fill one's mind with all sorts of vague fears of the dark recesses.

In the bed — pale, emaciated, with features drawn and altered — lay Mrs. Trevelyan. Every now and then her eyes opened, and wandered round without seeming to see anything; then closed, looking as if there was no strength in the lids and they fell wearily. Her breathing was very low and faint; and at times the breath seemed to be drawn heavily, causing me to start forward, fearing lest she was choking.

In this way the night grew on, older and older; I shivered with cold, and nervous apprehension. After a while my eyes fixed themselves involuntarily upon the white, glaring teeth of

the tortured boar, and I could scarcely repress a scream, as I saw Mrs. Trevelyan's large glassy eyes open and shut immediately beneath the animal; there seemed to my disturbed fancy to be some horrible and mysterious connection between the two sufferers. If I turned my head away, in some half-dozen mirrors at once, I saw the whole room reflected; and after a time it was almost difficult not to believe that all the pictures were animated; and that, gliding about me in all directions, were the unearthly representatives of the family.

In this wretched state of excitement, a weary time passed on: I dared neither move nor breathe freely; and I do believe I should have fainted from terror, had not I fallen asleep gazing fixedly upon the bed.

I was awakened by Mrs. Trevelyan turning restlessly, and murmuring my name. In a moment I was beside her; and inexperienced as I was, I saw that a change for the worse had taken place.

"Milly! Milly!" she whispered faintly, looking at me earnestly, as if to recall to my mind the promise I had made.

"I remember," said I. "Your message shall be given to her, if God spares my life to do it."

She pressed my hand and spoke some indistinct words, which I could not understand.

The sound of my voice aroused the nurse, and, with a very unexpected promptitude, she quickly

stood by the bed, holding a glass of some reviving cordial in her hand.

In a gentle and skilful manner, the result of long practice, she raised the patient's head, and administered the medicine; the beneficial effects of which were soon apparent, in the brightened eye and clear voice of the patient.

"Now, Miss," said the woman, "do you lie down and have a sleep. I've had a'most an hour I dare say (she had had at least four), an' I'll watch now."

"Do, Florence," whispered Mrs. Trevelyan, and thus urged—especially as the appearance which had alarmed me had vanished—I lay down.

I had not, however, been asleep long, when I awoke at the sound of moving feet, and upon looking up, I saw by the grey struggling light of the morning, that the terrible look had returned to the patient's face, and that some awful change was at hand.

In a moment I was by her side; her breathing was laboured, and at intervals the horrible death-rattle choked her. She evidently knew me, and wished to speak, but had not the power. I fell upon my knees beside her, and lifted her hand affectionately, while tears fell fast down my face. She smiled faintly and tenderly, and signed to us to raise her and give her more cordial. She was obeyed, and then had strength to say to me,—

"Pardon and blessing to my child! Full forgiveness to all!"

At this moment carriage wheels dashed up to the door, announcing, as I thought, the arrival of the Doctor; but Mrs. Trevelyan, as if warned by a mysterious instinct of some approaching trial, and nerved by Providence to meet it, started up in her bed, and cried eagerly,—

"Milly! Milly!"

In a few moments the door was hastily thrown open, and with a scream, Milly rushed in, and threw herself into her mother's arms, exclaiming,—

"Forgive me! forgive me! Oh, do not curse me, mother!"

Mrs. Trevelyan tried to speak, and her eyes brightened with an unearthly light, as she gasped out,—

"God pardon and bless"—but here her voice failed, and relaxing her hold of her child, she struggled slightly, and with a deep groan, fell back lifeless.

At the same moment a crimson stream spreading itself rapidly over the bed, from the spot where Milly had fallen, warned us of some fresh catastrophe; and when the nurse lifted her head from her mother's body, we found that she had broken a bloodvessel. Her life was ebbing fast away.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE much could be done, for good or ill, Mr. Stuart, who had been sent for by the nurse some time previously, entered the room. At once comprehending the scene, he went to Milly's relief. But all his efforts were vain: very slowly, but steadily, the life-blood flowed away; and in a short time the cold death-damps came out upon her pallid brow.

I sat by her and held her hand, and with my own eyes full of tears, looked upon the melancholy brilliancy of hers. Her white lips were drawn into thin straight lines, across the glittering teeth, and her face was so worn and altered, that she looked at least ten years older than when she left Mowbray, while round her eyes and mouth was a deep purple tinge.

Never was there so complete a wreck of youthful beauty! and as I gazed upon her I could not refrain from thanking God, that Mrs. Trevelyan

had been spared the agony of watching her daughter's life thus pass away.

Although far too weak to talk, the anguish of her countenance, and its inquiring, though deprecating looks, were painfully eloquent. There needed no words to tell what was passing in the mind of the dying girl, nor that her soul pined for knowledge of her mother's pardon. All that language could have spoken, was written in the aching gaze of her straining eyes, as she fixed them upon me.

I dared not speak, for Mr. Stuart had warned me that the slightest exertion or excitement would cause instant death, accelerating the flow of blood; and, as he had left the room to prepare some fresh styptics, I feared to utter a syllable. However, he soon returned, and after administering the medicine, and peremptorily forbidding Milly to speak, he said to me,—

“I am going to sit by that window; if you have anything to say to Miss Trevelyan, do so in as few and calm words as possible.”

And thus permitted, I repeated the message with which I had been entrusted; adding, as I wept over the sufferer,—“Your being here, Milly, proves that you are penitent; and your mother's spirit, speaking (she bade me tell you) from my lips, prays God to bless and pardon you, as she did.”

At this moment—warned, I suppose, by one of the domestics, of the events of the night, and for the first time—Lady Mowbray entered the room. A cry of anguish, causing Mr. Stuart to rush forward, broke from the lips of poor Milly, as her eyes fell upon her cousin's wife; and, raising herself with a sudden strength, she clasped her hands in agony, exclaiming,—

“Forgive me! forgive me!”

But her ladyship, though evidently shocked, was not of such an impulsive nature or so Christian a spirit as to be moved to forgiveness: she stood aloof, looking upon the scene with the calm mocking smile of a demon.

The blood was fast pouring from Milly's mouth, and her eyes were sinking back into their sockets; but their dying gaze was fixed imploringly upon Lady Mowbray, as she continued to gurgle forth the words, “Forgive! forgive!”

I was supporting Milly, and my arms and shoulders were covered with the frightful evidence of her suffering; while I speedily found, by her increasing weight, that death was at hand. Milly's anguish so wrung my heart, and the heartless conduct of Lady Mowbray so roused my indignation, that I called angrily to Mr. Stuart,—

“Send that woman away: she is killing Milly! God and her mother have pardoned her, and she shall not be tortured in her dying moments by the

wretch whose treachery led her into sin, and who now exults in her agony and remorse."

"Miss Sackville! Miss Sackville!" remonstrated the Doctor.

"It is true—it is true! Judge for yourself! Who but a fiend would stand there smiling, when a dying penitent implores pardon?"

At these words Mr. Stuart turned, and apparently saw enough in the countenance of her ladyship to disgust him; for, with his usual quick, positive manner, he said, going up to her,—

"Allow me to lead your ladyship from the room. I cannot suffer any patient, in any circumstances, who is under my care, to undergo the torture. Your conduct, madam, is cruel.

"You are insolent, sir!" exclaimed Lady Mowbray, reddening with anger. "I do not know by whom you were summoned here; but it was without my authority, and I request you will now leave my house at once. I will not be insulted," she added, passionately.

"As soon as the duty for which I came is done, I shall retire from your ladyship's house with pleasure. In the mean time I must insist upon your leaving this room."

Scarcely had the Doctor's words been uttered a moment, when his attention was called to Milly; who, choking with the hemorrhage, was again struggling convulsively for breath.

during my absence, most of the old servants had been dismissed, and were replaced by young inexperienced ones, fewer in number, and anything but accustomed to such work as now fell to their lot.

"What has been the matter?" I asked of Helen; for my mother evidently shunned the question. "Why are Reynolds and Baker, and Sally and old George gone? and who chose these awkward creatures?"

"Papa. He sent away the old servants because, he said, they were idle and extravagant; but I believe the reason was, that he couldn't pay them."

"Nonsense, Helen! who put that idea into your head?"

"Reynolds. I heard her say to Baker, that it was well poor grandpapa couldn't see how things were going on, for he would break his heart. 'We are leaving to-day,' she said: 'it will be the family's turn next, for the Captain can't pay half his debts.'"

"Poor mamma!"

"Why, Flor., you don't believe it's as bad as that! At the worst it will only be to shut up the place for a few years, and go abroad like the Combertons. Papa's not poor, only a little harrassed, I dare say."

"I'm afraid he is, Helen. I fear and believe

that matters are quite as bad as Reynolds says, and that they are coming to a crisis."

"What do you mean, Florence? You frighten me!"

"I know so little of business, that I scarcely know myself what I mean; but my fear is that we shall soon leave here for ever."

"For ever! Oh, Florence! how can you be so cruel? How can you say such dreadful things? I shall die if I have to go away for ever; I am sure I shall."

"I hope not, Helen; for, indeed, I believe that you will be tried ere long."

"Why? why do you believe so?"

"Because I have long feared that the expenses here and in London, were far more than could be afforded; and I know that tradesmen in the town, have applied time after time for their bills, without receiving them."

"So they do everywhere, I dare say."

"Perhaps so. But how does that make our case better, Helen?"

"I don't know; but I never will believe that we shall have to leave here, for more than a year or two at the most, and I shouldn't mind that. I should like to go to Italy, especially if we went to Rome, and lived near the Combertons. I think I should enjoy it very much, shouldn't you?"

"No; I would rather stay here than in any

other place in the world. I love Ingerdyne with all my heart."

"So do I, to live in when one's old; but now, when we are girls, I should delight to go abroad. Yes; nothing like dear old Ingerdyne when we are old too; except a visit of three or four years to Italy. Do you know, Florence, that now I think of all this, I am rather glad of these temporary difficulties."

"Are you, Helen? You do not know what poverty is, or you would not say so."

"Poverty! Going to Rome for a few years is not poverty, surely. If it is, I should like it very much."

The day after this conversation, I discovered that the carriage and horses, which had been given to my mother by her father after his wife's death, were absent; and upon inquiring about them from a groom, was told that they had been sent to London by his master's orders.

There was something very strange, not only in the words the man used to convey this information, but in his manner too; for it seemed to intimate that there were even worse purposes to which things could be put, than their sale. I was frightened and perplexed, as well as indignant at this appropriation of my mother's especial property, and returned to the house in a very angry mood.

When I reached it, I was met by a servant with a

message from my mother, requesting me to speak to a person who had called upon some business, for which he required to see one of the family. I went into the library, where I found a perfect stranger.

He seemed slightly embarrassed upon seeing me, although he bowed courteously as he rose from the chair he had taken. I was in one of my proudest and most disagreeable tempers, caused by anger at what I had just heard, so I bent my head carelessly, and waited for him to speak."

"Miss Sackville, I presume," he said at last. I bowed.

"My business is with your father; but as it appears that he is absent, I should wish to see Mrs. Sackville. May I have that honour?"

"My mother is particularly engaged, and therefore has desired me to attend you and receive any message you may wish to send."

"My errand is business of a most urgent nature, and scarcely admits of a message."

"Can I not do then, as well as my mother? I am not more unused to business than she is."

"I think not. I wanted to consult her, how a most painful *exposé* of your father's affairs could be avoided, and I imagine that you could scarcely answer for her in such a matter."

"No. If it is that, you must see her; but I wish you would tell me something more, that I may prepare her."

He considered a moment, then said,—

“I will be frank with you, Miss Sackville. I am solicitor for a very heavy judgment-creditor of your father’s, and I am come here empowered by my client to put an execution into this house, unless Mrs. Sackville can give him security for the debt.”

“How much is it?” I asked, with a failing heart.

“Sixteen hundred pounds.”

“Has my father been applied to? You seem to be taking a very extreme course.”

“You would not say so, if you knew all the circumstances. I have seen and written to Captain Sackville at least a dozen times, and my client is satisfied that the only way left of getting his money, is by putting in an execution.”

“Then what is it you wish my mother to do, supposing that she has the inclination and the power to act? I had better go to her with some definite proposal.”

“To give my client a tangible security for the payment of his claim, within a reasonable time.”

I went to my mother. She was reading in her dressing-room, having apparently forgotten the arrival of a visitor. At first, when I told her the stranger’s business, she seemed paralyzed; and, say what I would, I could induce her to propose nothing; but at last she said,—

"I have no power, Florence ; or at least I can do nothing without seeing your father. I have signed so many documents at different times, that I do not know whether I have any power left."

"But surely, mother, you knew what you signed? You would not put your name to any deed you did not understand?"

"I did what I thought was for the best, Florence ; and I am no lawyer to study technicalities. This man had better see your father."

"But he will not. He says that he has already seen and written to him a dozen times."

"Then I can do nothing. Your father is not here ; and I can do nothing without his authority."

"Will you not see this person? He will be better satisfied when he has spoken to you."

"No ; I could not bear it."

"He is very civil ; and, if he is not satisfied in some way, he will certainly put in this execution."

"Oh, no, no, Florence ! that must not be ; I could not live to see it."

"But how can it be avoided, mother? If you have no power to give him the necessary security, and cannot bring yourself to endure an interview with him, I do not see what can be done."

"You go to him, Florence ; you are so cool :

go and try what can be arranged. Tell him to see your father—to see the lawyer—anything, only do not let there be an execution.”

And so I went, to say nothing, offer nothing, do nothing. But, happily for me, the lawyer was a kind man, well to do in the world, and a gentleman: and, having a daughter of my own age, he pitied my perplexity and sorrow.

I ordered luncheon, and while he took refreshment, I sat and thought. Valuable thought that, which leads to no result! At last, I said,—

“I really do not know what to do, or propose; unless you will, upon your return to town, see my father.”

“That I am sorry to say is out of my power. My positive instructions are, either to obtain security from Mrs. Sackville, or to take the other step I named to you. I have come here unaccompanied by the necessary officers, entirely upon my own responsibility; and, since I can effect no satisfactory arrangement, I grieve to say that I have no alternative but to proceed.”

“Not immediately! oh, surely, not now?”

“At once, I fear.”

“Oh no, no! surely something can be done to avert such a disgrace. It will kill my mother. Oh, if my father were but here!”

“I do not think he could facilitate the arrangement of matters, since he has known of the pro-

bability of this for weeks ; in fact, I saw him a fortnight since, and warned him."

"And what did he say? Did he offer nothing —no terms by which this might be averted?"

"None: except to refer me to Mrs. Sackville."

"But he must have means: I am sure he has."

"I doubt it: his expenses would swallow up very large resources."

"If I could see him," I exclaimed, as a thought struck me, "I should know at once what could be done. How long will you give me, before you put in this terrible execution?"

"Forgive me for seeming hard-hearted; but I cannot leave this house, until I have either security for my client's debt, or have placed the property here in the custody of others."

I felt faint and cold: a shivering came all over me; but I rallied and replied,—

"This is indeed quick work! Well, sir, how long, then, will you be my mother's guest? Let me know, that I may go to London and see Captain Sackville."

The man was, and had been doing me a kindness, and I knew and felt it; but for my life I could not then have spoken more civilly. He looked annoyed at my tone, but answered more courteously than I deserved.

"This is Wednesday; I will stay until Saturday evening. If, then, I do not hear from you

satisfactorily, I shall be compelled to follow the instructions I have received."

"I thank you for this concession. I must now see my mother, and learn her wishes; and when I have sent and secured a place in the mail, which passes through Abberly at four o'clock, I will see you again. It would be a mere farce bidding you welcome, and putting everything at your disposal—for, alas! that they are already; but I really trust that you may be comfortable."

"Thank you: that is quite as much as I can expect. I dare say you think me very hard-hearted and uncourteous; but if ever you should be unfortunate enough to know more of the dark side of things than you have hitherto seen, you will find that I have done both more and less, than many others would under similar circumstances."

"I do not doubt it," I replied, impatiently; for I was irritated beyond measure at his civility. He seemed so cool, while I was so excited. Had I been older or wiser, I should have been grateful for his forbearance; but pride, anger, and apprehension, were all struggling together in my mind, and united to make me rude and wayward.

CHAPTER VI.

I FOUND my mother in a most painful state. By turns she was passionately indignant against her husband, and scornfully indifferent; one moment predicting our deaths in the workhouse, the next defying law and its power. At first, she positively refused to allow me to go to London, and chid me severely for proposing such a thing; then, in a minute after, she spoke of it as being the only chance left, of warding off positive starvation.

It was not until very late that she made up her mind what I should do; and then I had barely time to receive some particulars from Mr. Comyn, have a walking-dress packed up, and ride Sancho to Abberly, before the mail passed through. I reached the town only ten minutes in advance of the coach; but that allowed me time to change my riding-habit, and put on a more simple travelling costume.

I had never before journeyed alone to London, and when the bustle was over I was at first very

nervous ; but, happily the anxiety inseparable from my errand soon overpowered every minor annoyance, and I ceased to fidget about anything.

It was eight o'clock when we reached the metropolis ; the lamps were lighted, and everything looked so glaring and unlike home, that, when the coach stopped at last, I was thoroughly bewildered.

My father's hotel was in Grosvenor-street ; but how far that was from my present locality, I knew no more than if I had just landed from the moon. Fortunately the coachman had recognised me, and (wondering, I dare say, to see Mr. Vere's grand-daughter in such a forlorn situation), came up and offered his services. It was a relief, and I felt grateful. It needs to feel oneself utterly desolate, before one fully appreciates the worth of kindness.

"Is anybody coming to meet you, Miss?" asked the man ; "or do you stop here?"

"Oh, no," I answered quickly ; "I am going to my father in Lower Grosvenor-street : but I don't very well know how to set about it."

"You had better have a coach, Miss. Shall I call one for you? Does the Captain know as you're coming by me?"

"No, he does not expect me ; and, therefore, I shall be very much obliged if you will order some conveyance for me, and tell the man where to go."

“ Any luggage, Miss ? ”

“ Only the little bag the groom gave you at Abberly.”

“ All right, then. Here’s a wehicle ! Mind the step—that’s right : now, then, here’s the bag :—never seed a lady with so little luggage afore.—Can I do anything else ? You’ll be all safe. Good-night, Miss.”

After a long, slow, jolting ride, I got to Grosvenor-street at last. In answer to my inquiry for my father, I was told that he was not at home, nor expected until very late, as he was gone with a party to Richmond.

“ Then I will come in and wait,” I said. “ Be so good as to inform me as soon as he arrives ; and, in the mean time, I will write a letter in his room.”

The man hesitated ; but at that moment my travelling bag with a brass plate upon it, bearing the address, “ Miss Sackville, Ingerdyne,” was brought in from the hackney-coach, and as soon as it caught his eye he said civilly,—

“ I beg your pardon, ma’am ; but am I to tell Captain Sackville, when he returns, that any member of his family is here ? ”

“ Certainly. I am his daughter.”

The man bowed, as if whatever scruples he had entertained were satisfied by this explanation, and led me into a large drawing-room.

"I don't know; unless you can persuade him to take my bill at an indefinite period,—say, ten years. I see no other means of payment."

"There are the horses: surely some of them might be sold. I heard Sir Wallace Mowbray say that Lancelot was well worth four hundred pounds; and you told me that you had refused three hundred for Skyrocket. If they were sold ——"

"Spare yourself the trouble of imagining what might be the result of such a proceeding, since it is impossible. The horses you name were sold yesterday."

"And the money — surely, father, you can appropriate some of it to this debt?"

"Not a *sou*. And for the best of all reasons — it is already appropriated."

"Impossible! when you knew what was hanging over my mother at Ingerdyne? You cannot be in earnest."

"I have an idea that you will find me so."

"Then what is to be done?"

"Nothing; as I told you at first. I have no more power to pay that meddling fellow than I have to fly; and, therefore, it is useless worrying me about it. Your mother has brought it on herself, by persisting in keeping a set of idle extravagant harpies in the shape of servants. The establishment she maintains at Ingerdyne is large

enough for a nobleman. Such infernal extravagance must come to an end some day !”

My blood, which had been gradually rising to boiling heat for the last five minutes, now burned fiercely at this unjust charge, and I said, passionately,—

“ The establishment my mother has kept up in her father’s house, was bequeathed to her by him, with ample means for its support. If those have failed, it is not from *her* recklessness.”

“ From whose then, young lady ? ” retorted my father, his eyes glittering with rage ; “ from whose, then ? ”

“ It does not become me to make accusations, although it does to refute them. Upon whose conscience soever our ruin lies, my mother is innocent.”

“ Indeed ! you have been well taught. Is this dutifulness to me a part of your mother’s lessons ? ”

“ For shame, father ! for shame ! You *know* that that insinuation is false and groundless. You know that never in her whole life did my mother speak slightingly of you to her children ; and that you should say so, is worse than all the rest.”

“ How dare you speak in this way to me ? Are you not afraid ? ”

“ No. I speak the truth, and I have no fear.”

“ Very brave, very dutiful, and very becoming ! I am sorry it is so late ; had it been earlier, I

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should have been much amused, I dare say, in listening to you for another half hour: but I am very tired, and therefore must close the farce by wishing you good-night;" and, with a contemptuous bow, he rang the bell, and put an end to all conversation by throwing up the window and leaning out, until the waiter entered.

"Order a room to be prepared for Miss Sackville, and when it is ready send the chambermaid to her. Good-night, Florence!" and with these words he left the room.

For some time after, I sat perfectly still: not thinking—for that implies calmness and self-possession, neither of which good things were mine—but drearily, stupidly, still. At last the woman came to usher me to my chamber, and I followed her mechanically.

I believe I should that night have walked deliberately through an open window, after any shadow I had fancied beckoned me. I have once or twice experienced something of the same sort since; but only in degree: never to the same extent as I did then. I can only account for the excess of my mental prostration that night, by the fact of my being so young, so tired, and so overpowered with a new sense of responsibility. For this reason my proceedings were very unlike the usual doings of heroines: for, thoroughly exhausted and bewildered, I went to bed and slept soundly.

It was, however, scarcely seven o'clock the next morning when I awoke. The night's rest had dissipated all my apathy, and daylight had restored all my fears and doubts and energies. I sprang instantly from bed, and, while I dressed, tried to think.

What was to be done? That was the sole question which presented itself to be answered. Turn my thoughts which way I would, back, like the needle to the north, they reverted to the one all-powerful attraction.

"What is to be done?—what is to be done?" appeared written upon everything and place: wherever I looked, I seemed to see it. But the answer was nowhere.

That there was no help to be looked for from my father, was very evident; and both he and my mother had said that she had no power. Who then had? Who was the proper person to borrow money upon Ingerdyne itself? It was horrible to think of mortgaging the dear old place; but anything was better than what Mr. Comyn had threatened. An execution! It seemed as if it would rouse my grandfather from his grave. He, who had been so scrupulous and exact, who paid rather before than after, and would have thought it a crime to incur recklessly a debt he might have difficulty in meeting. How would the bare idea of an execution have wounded and insulted

him. Better sell even a portion of the land than let the old house he had loved and dwelt in, in which he had been born and died, be desecrated by the feet of bailiffs.

Thinking thus, I went down to the room I had left the night before; hoping, early as it was, to see my father, and urge him to release Ingerdyne from the presence of Mr. Comyn, by the sacrifice of some portion of the estate. When I entered, I found the breakfast-table laid, and a letter addressed to me in my father's hand, lying upon it. I tore it open and read,—

“DEAR FLORENCE,

“I am obliged to leave town without seeing you again, in order to keep an engagement, made some months since, for the shooting in Scotland. I am sorry that I cannot relieve your anxiety respecting your visitor at Ingerdyne, nor give you any directions how to proceed. As I told you last night, both are out of my power. You can, if you like, see my attorney; though I really do not know how he can help you. I enclose his address. You had better return at once to Ingerdyne. I have left James in town, with orders to see you to the mail, and then follow me.

“Yours truly,

“G. SACKVILLE.”

As I finished reading this astounding letter, the waiter entered with breakfast. I asked eagerly,—

“Is my father gone?”

“Yes, ma’am, he started at five o’clock. It was quite a sudden thing, I fancy; for he was to have had a dinner party to-day.”

“Indeed!” said I, almost unconsciously.

“Yes, ma’am; and he’s left notes of excuse to be sent to the gentlemen. Hope there’s nothing the matter: none of the family ill, or anything of that sort?”

“Is there not a servant waiting here to see me?” I asked, anxious to get rid of the man’s talkativeness.

“No, ma’am; the Captain ordered him to come down after you had breakfasted.”

“Then, when he does come, let me see him directly.”

Left alone at last, I was indeed alarmed and perplexed. That my father should have left London in this extraordinary manner without seeing me again, was both ominous and distressing: he evidently feared a second interview, and to avoid it had had recourse to this unworthy stratagem.

Besides the increased difficulties of my position, I was mortified and hurt beyond expression. I was less indignant at being thus trifled with, than pained that my father should have stooped so low as to plan and act a deception. What would my

mother—what would that prying lawyer say and think, when they heard it?

A terrible fear came over me as I dwelt upon all this. Was some horrible crisis coming, and had he fled to avoid it? Was Ingerdyne already charged with borrowed money, and was the ruin I had long feared, come in this worst shape? True, I had dreaded for months, that, ultimately, the dear old place would pass from us; but only in the way of honourable sale, to pay the heavy debts of reckless extravagance: not as payment to *one*, leaving many losers, and ourselves characterless. No, I had never thought of this.

Ruin! ah, this was ruin indeed; most utter ruin: hopeless, irredeemable. Ruin which nothing could soothe or soften; for it was the wreck both of integrity and reputation. The honour of my grandfather's bright old name was gone for ever, now that it was to be written bankrupt; and that which he had left stainless and beloved, was now, in the very birthplace of his race, to become a scorn and a byword—a synonyme for heartless extravagance, and reckless selfishness.

I was very, very miserable. I felt as if the beautiful world had suddenly become a desert, and that life was a weary thing to bear. I knew nothing of prayer and its holy balm; so that now, in my day of affliction, I was like a rudderless ship, tempest-tost and helpless.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER a while, James made his appearance ; and, remembering that my mother's carriage was in London, I desired him to bring it, and drive me a few miles on the road, that I might escape all unnecessary imprisonment in the coach.

"'Tain't in town, Miss," said the man, with an almost imperceptible tinge of displeasure in his voice. "The Captain drove it down to Richmond again this morning ; for all I told him Mrs. Sackville wouldn't like her pets knocked about so. Them hosses works like jobbers ; back'ards and for'ards to Richmond most every day, and round the park, and a-shopping besides. It's too much for 'em by more than half."

"Shopping ! my father's shopping *can't* tire them much, James, I should think."

"T'ent the Captain, Miss, but them as he lets have 'em."

There was a strange look in the man's face as

he said this, which assured me that there was some mystery in the background. But it was impossible for me to question my father's servant upon his master's secrets; and therefore, to his evident mortification, I dismissed him, with directions to find out the earliest coach to Abberly and then to return to me.

While he was present, and my discretion in danger, I repressed my curiosity easily; but when I was alone, with nothing to do but to think, my suspicions became both urgent and painful.

An angry expression once used by a passionate and favourite servant of my father's, after receiving a severe reprimand from his master, and which had been unheeded at the time, now recurred to my mind, suggesting a terrible reason for his constant absence and enormous expenses. The suspicion was maddening, but was no sooner aroused, than a thousand circumstances, hitherto forgotten or unnoticed, rose before my memory to confirm it. For a few minutes I thought deliberately, gathering and combining facts, inuendoes, and careless words; which now, in this fresh light, looked almost like admissions. Altogether, they made a hideous whole; and, almost appalled by it, I sprang from my seat and paced the room hurriedly, as if in action I should lose the sense of suffering.

For a very long time I walked thus restlessly

about, thinking of a thousand unconnected things; scarcely one of which remained an instant in my mind, although each one brought in its train a host of others.

My heart was heavy with a sense of our difficulties at Ingerdyne, their apparent hopelessness, and my father's too evident faithlessness; and yet with these pressing subjects, each harassing and painful enough of itself to have engrossed the entire faculties of my mind, I was wandering in fancy over the most absurd and irrelevant matters.

At last, thoroughly tired of walking and dreaming, I resumed my seat, and was speedily recalled to reason by the sight of my father's open letter, which lay beside me. I took it up and read it again and again. Indifferent as its strain had seemed to me before, yet now, seen through the new light of the writer's perfidy, it appeared heartless and cruel. He was evidently abandoning us to our fate: the fate that his own heartless selfishness had prepared. No help, no support, no sympathy, was to be expected from him. The question, What was to be done? now pressed for instant consideration. I rested my elbows upon a little table before me, and buried my head in my hands, to shut out sight and sound; and tried to think practically.

Upon one thing I soon decided, and that was, to keep my mother, if possible, ignorant of the

discovery I had made ; and at all hazards, short of a positive falsehood, to preserve Helen from the knowledge too.

This point settled, the next difficulty was, how to release Ingerdyne from the custody into which it had fallen. There was no hope from my father ; no concession to be expected from Mr. Comyn ; my mother had no power ; and, as far as money went, I was helpless. Yet something must be done, and that quickly ; or credit, honour, and reputation would be gone for ever. But what was it to be ? Which way was I to turn for counsel and aid ?

It may appear strange, but the idea of consulting with my mother never occurred to me. I knew and felt, as well as if I had been told, that my time for action had come, and that whatever was to be done must be done by me. I was ignorant as an infant of all forms and ways of business ; but common sense soon convinced me, that, so long as I knew nothing of Mr. Comyn's powers, I should be working in the dark, and providing against things which might never have the right to happen. But whom to ask ? in whom could I confide ? There were plenty of whom I could inquire, but who was there that I could rely upon in such an emergency ?

If a person wants to assure himself of the number and value of his friends, only let him ask

himself this question at his need, and he will learn a useful lesson. As I sat puzzling over it, I leaned forward heavily upon the table, and the pressure made my repeater strike. Oh, my fairy god-mother! did your hand touch it? It was a welcome sound to me, for it brought to my memory the image of the giver—Mr. Lyle.

“I will go to *him*,” I said, confidently; “he will help me. I can rely upon him.”

In five minutes I had made up my mind, had written a letter to my mother, telling her that unforeseen circumstances had arisen which rendered a visit to Forest Home essential, and in less than half an hour I was safely escorted by James to the Birmingham Railway station.

This was my first expedition upon a railway, and the nervous alarm which I then felt may now appear absurd and irrational; but there is something in the tremendous impetus, the resistless and blind force of powerful machinery, that, to persons unaccustomed to it, is really awful: its mechanical energy and activity, devoid alike of independent volition and sentient qualities, while rendering it controllable, make its powers appear terrible to the timid.

This impressed me when I first beheld the huge engine approaching, hissing, throbbing, and sending forth volumes of smoke and steam. And when the shriek was heard, facetiously called a

whistle, but like no sound on this side Styx, and the multitudinous wheels of the cumbrous centipede rattled on the iron road, as we were whirled along at what seemed reckless speed—plunging into dark tunnels, which were filled with a roar of noise and vapour, the carriages oscillating to and fro, and spectral signal posts seeming to start up up here and there (whether warning of danger or pointing in safety, one cannot tell), I confess it did not need the odour of burnt oil or steam to add to my discomfort and alarm.

I remember, many years after this first excursion, being obliged to sleep at a railway hotel, in a room immediately over the station-yard. Those who have no fear or dislike of railway sights and sounds, can never conceive the horror of that night to me. I could not sleep for the noise and disquiet, and that unearthly, wailing shriek, which seems like nothing so much as the cry of a tortured fiend; but sat watching the monstrous engines come and go, panting, shrieking, and rushing in and out—their blazing eyes glaring through the darkness of the night, and the furnaces glowing like the fiery maw of some demon of the infernal regions.

By a most happy chance, the first person I met upon the platform at Birmingham, was Mr. Lyle. He was returning from Liverpool to Forest Home, and was only waiting to see his

carriage unstrapped from the truck, that he might go on at once. As soon as he saw me, he came forward with outstretched hands, and grasping mine, exclaimed,—

“This is charming! I’ve been wishing for you and your mother all day, and here you are. What good fairy has befriended me by spiriting you into these parts?”

“The same I suppose who sent you here to meet me, for I was on my way to Forest Home. Bold girl, am I not, to come without an invitation?”

“Very. And I’ll punish you by shutting you up there. But who is with you? Where are Helen and your mother?”

“At Ingerdyne. I am alone, and have just come from London.”

“From London! and going down to Forest Home alone!” repeated the old gentleman thoughtfully; losing at once all his gaiety, and scrutinizing my looks. “My dear child, what is the matter? You look pale and tired. Come with me into the hotel here, and tell me what has happened. John, look after the carriage, and when it is off, have horses ready to put to, the moment I want them. Come, Flory.”

And drawing my arm through his, he led me into the hotel, ordered refreshment, which he insisted upon my taking before I talked, and then

dismissing the waiter, drew a chair opposite to me, and prepared to listen.

Without interrupting me with more than a single question, he heard all I had to say; and at the end sighed heavily. Then, after a pause, he said,—

“To pay out this man who is in possession, with a view of releasing Ingerdyne, appears to me very much like attempting to stem a torrent by raising an embankment in one place, leaving the rest of the beach right and left without protection. For if you succeeded in getting rid of this claimant, what assurance have you that half a dozen more, may not take his place to-morrow?”

“None.”

“Then is it wise—supposing you had the means—to pay him all the money you can raise, without some certainty that by doing so you really free yourselves, and save Ingerdyne?”

“No, I don’t think it is. But, nevertheless, I am sure that if I had the power, I should do it at once.”

“Would you? What, if the money was your own, independently of your parents?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are more generous than prudent, Flory: at least I think so at this moment. Perhaps I shall alter my opinion when I see Ingerdyne again, and be as foolish as you are. However, that will soon be decided, for I will

go back with you and see this Mr. Comyn myself, eh, Flory—shall I?”

“Oh, yes, yes! Pray, do! I am so thankful, and so will poor mamma be. You dear, good, kind Mr. Lyle, I am *so* much obliged to you.”

“No doubt, no doubt. I’m quite willing to believe you; on condition that you prove what you say, Miss Flory, by returning to London with me to-night in the mail train. I have an idea that it will be best to reach Ingerdyne to-morrow as early as we can; which we can do by going to town to-night, and posting to Ingerdyne in the morning.”

“I’m ready now.”

“No, no. You must have your dinner first, and two or three hours sleep afterwards. There is plenty of time, for the train does not leave till midnight; and heroines are good for nothing if they don’t eat to keep themselves alive. Ladies who live on air and moonshine, are always in the way, Flory.”

The next day we reached Ingerdyne by twelve o’clock, and found Mr. Comyn writing letters in the library, with Helen sitting beside him, amusing herself partly by teasing and bewildering him, and partly in knitting a cat’s bed. They told us that my mother was sketching, in the park under the great hawthorn; and thitherwards of course we went. As we came in sight of the tree, Mr. Lyle said,—

"Your mother is not very much given to asking questions, Flory; therefore, if you are careful to volunteer nothing, you may easily escape telling her anything that you discovered in London, which will distress her."

"I hope so. I would not be the means of any greater estrangement than exists already."

"No; and depend upon it, Flory, that in this and every similar case, the wisest as well as the kindest thing other people can do, is to hold their tongues. Telling grievances never does any good, but almost always a great deal of harm. If you know anything ill of a man or his wife, keep it to yourself. Or if you think you *must* tell it, bite your tongue hard for half an hour before you indulge your talking propensities. And now, as soon as you have said the little you have to say, leave your mother and me together, and go and talk to Mr. Comyn; or order luncheon; or do anything else except breathe a syllable of business."

And so admonished, I gave my mother a very faithful account of all the nothings of my journey; of my father's inability to assist us in dismissing our visitor, and my progress towards Forest Home.

When this was done, and I had answered a few safe inquiries from Mr. Lyle, I gladly obeyed the hint he gave me to withdraw; and, fairly tired out with travelling, planning, and want of rest, went

to my own cool, quiet room, where, throwing myself upon the bed, I soon fell asleep.

It was late in the day when I awoke. Twilight was gathering over the earth, and my apartment was in deep shadow. For a few minutes I lay in that dreamy, half awake state, which follows a long and heavy sleep. From this I was first aroused by a bustle below in the shrubbery, and a voice, which I knew to be Mr. Comyn's, saying,—

“Good-bye! Don't forget to remember me to your sister. I should like to have seen her and said farewell, but as that can't be, I leave my apologies and adieux in your care.”

And before, quick as I was, I could reach the window, I heard the carriage steps shut up with a bang, the crack of the postboy's whip, and the forward plunge of the horses, bearing our visitor away. I was vexed; for, now the first shock of the news he had brought was over, I felt that I had behaved abominably to a man who had been most considerate to us; and I was annoyed that I had lost the opportunity of telling him so.

In this self-reproach time wore on, so that it was not until some time after the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away, that I found leisure to wonder how our deliverance from Mr. Comyn's protection had been effected. That his power over us had departed, was certain; for I

remembered how strongly he had insisted upon the impossibility of his leaving Ingerdyne until his client's demand was satisfied. But how that had been accomplished was the mystery, which, as soon as I could make myself presentable, I hastened to have explained by Mr. Lyle.

I found him sitting alone in the dusky library, gazing absently out of the window. He did not hear me when I entered, so that my first word made him start, exclaiming,—

“Eh, Flory! is that you? How you made me jump, you monkey!”

“Did I? That proves what fairy-like steps mine must be, that they cannot be heard approaching. But what are you doing here by yourself, in the dark?”

“Thinking, Missy, thinking. Not always a very pleasant or profitable occupation.”

“And that's thrue,” said I, with a brogue. “But what's yer honor bewilderin' yer brains about now?”

“About everybody's business but my own, Paddy; and, as usual in such cases, as I told you before to-day, doing nobody any good, and myself a great deal of harm.”

“That's shocking! How would a *confidante* mend matters?” I said, sitting down on a stool beside him. “I'm ready to be confided in.”

“Every woman is, I verily believe. You've

all as great a hankering after a secret, as your mother Eve. But as you had something to do with my thoughts, I'll gratify you this time by telling you what they were about."

"That's right and wise. I'm quite prepared."

And leaning my head against the arm of his great chair, thus feigning an ease I did not feel, I sat looking up through the dim light at Mr. Lyle, who began abruptly,—

"You know Mr. Comyn is gone?"

"Yes, but nothing more; and I'm full of curiosity to know how his departure has been brought about."

"In plain English, you want to know if he has been paid, eh?"

"Exactly."

"No. But I have undertaken that he shall be, if his claim is found to be correct. But of that I have some misgivings. I know the name of his client, and the reputation he used to bear; if it is not altered, he has no right, either in law or justice, to the claim he makes. He has somehow or other contrived to keep his lawyer in ignorance; and, not knowing your mother's want of means, relied upon frightening her into payment.

"But my father must know."

"That I shall settle with him, Flory: you and I won't discuss it."

"Then what were you musing upon? If all this is so well arranged, what were you thinking about so gravely when I came in?"

"About you and yours: the future prospects of the whole family—they are very gloomy, Flory."

I only answered with a sigh: my feigned gaiety was gone.

"Never mind, Flory; never mind," rejoined the kind old man, taking the hand which lay upon his knee, and patting it; "keep a brave heart, my child; and remember that the stormiest life is but a short one."

Here, again! no word of religion—no saying, "Bear up, for God is with you"; only a bidding me to remember, as consolation, what ought rather to have made me coward at my thoughtlessness—"that life is short."

I did not think thus then, but answered,—

"Ay, so it may be: though life is not always to be measured by years. Its truest gauge is oftenest its suffering. Much sorrow can be crushed into few days."

"That's true; but it is a sad thing to be learned in suffering so early. You are over young yet, Flory, to claim the birthright and inheritance of man."

"Perhaps!" I answered musingly, for I thought of the famishing children I had seen in the London streets only that morning, and remembered

that I been exempt for eighteen years from the misery they had borne from infancy.

There was a short silence, after which Mr. Lyle said,—

“You will have to leave Ingerdyne, Flory.”

“Shall we? Must it really be?”

“I think so: I see no alternative. Your poor grandfather left your mother's property entirely at her own disposal, and six months after his death, she formally resigned it to her husband. Even if this place were unencumbered, she has not the power to raise a shilling upon it; and I very much fear, Flory, that she is now about to reap the consequence of her imprudence. How she could so forget you and Helen, I cannot conceive.”

“Poor Helen!” I murmured.

“And poor *you*, too. What can *you* do more for yourself than she can?”

“I don't know. But she is so young and sensitive—so unfit to bear sorrow and trial.”

“So pretty and silly, you mean. Never fear for Helen; she'll find friends everywhere: there are always simpletons ready to pity and soothe such doll-like faces as hers. You are not half so likely to meet with sympathy as she is.”

“I know it,” I replied, mournfully; “I have not one friend, where Helen has a dozen.”

“Nonsense! You have not one *dangler* to

Helen's dozen, you mean. No; and you never will have."

"Why?"

"D'ye want them?" he asked, sharply.

"Yes, I think I do: it's miserable to have nobody to care about one," I answered in a thick voice, for tears were rising.

"But you have, Flory: you have those who love you well. The few perhaps: but who would not rather have *one* diamond, than many imitations?"

"I would not; if the diamond were dull, and the counterfeit brilliant."

"Florence!" exclaimed the old man in amazement.

"It is true. I used to think differently, but now, I would give half my life to be a favourite, such as I see so many other people. How is it that I am less worthy than everybody else? Am I more foolish, or selfish, or what?"

"No; but you are prouder, and more exacting. You look deeper, and want more integrity and generosity in your associates than most people care about. And in proportion as you find men and women false, hollow, or mean, you despise and shun them; instead of being content, and taking things and people as they appear on the surface. While you do this, Flory, and curl your lip so scornfully at what the world does, you never will be popular."

“ And would you have me not do it ? ” I asked, indignantly. “ Would you have me profess what I don’t feel, and feign friendships for those whose littleness and meanness I despise from my very heart ?—those who cringe to the powerful, and oppress the poor ; those who promise fairly, and act falsely ; those who plot another’s ruin, smiling and stabbing all the while ? Would you have me conciliate such as these ? ”

“ No. But if you would be popular, you must neither openly condemn, nor even avoid them. Popular people, Flory, have to walk over very dirty ground.”

“ *I never will.* ”

“ I know it ; and, therefore, you never will be popular.”

“ Well, then, content.”

“ Ay, Flory, that’s right. All through your life spurn meanness, craft, and time-serving. Dare to be yourself, let what will come ; and instead of craving to be liked by the many, strive only for the love and friendship of the few. You will then be respected and trusted, relied upon, and honoured, even by the herd ; while by those whose love is worth having, you will be cherished and prized.”

“ Ah ! you told me long ago that mine would be a lonely life.”

“ Yes. But so it would be even in prosperity.

You have none of the elements of popularity in you: you are too sensible to be vain of praise; and you are too impulsive, generous, and high-spirited—too reckless of the consequence of exposing evil, and too craving after affection—ever to be a general favourite. But you said just now you were content.”

“ Yea.”

“ That sounds very much like ‘No.’ But never mind. I have a proposal to make, which will show you that some people love you, even as well as you wish. Now, listen carefully to what I am going to say. I shall speak to you as to a prudent and passionless woman; forgetting that you are an impetuous girl of eighteen.

“ Matters here are, I fear, coming rapidly to a crisis. I have utterly failed in rousing your mother to any exertion, or even apprehension; for now that Mr. Comyn is gone, her fears seem to have vanished too, and she has become as placid again as ever. I see no chance of doing her any good except against her inclination, which I am not at all disposed to attempt. In the event of a crash here, I have no idea what she intends to do. For her, therefore, I can effect nothing; but for you it is different: and, as I said, I have a proposal to make on the subject.

“ I think you know that I was once so happy as to have a daughter, and perhaps you have been

told that I lost her, when she was about the age which you were at your first visit to Forest Home. Upon the first day of next month, I shall have lived ten years since that time."

Here Mr. Lyle stopped; his voice was husky, and, though it was dark, I knew that tears were in his eyes. I had often heard of Amy Lyle, and her father's devoted love for her; and I knew by the trembling of his hand, and the catching of his breath in speaking, that the mere mention of her name had awakened all his grief. It was many minutes before he spoke again, and when he did, it was in a mournful tone.

"From that day, Flory, I have lived alone; and, except you, I have never known any one whom I could bear to see and hear in *her* place. You are like her in many ways: you have the same thoughts on many subjects; and, but that your voices are different, I could close my eyes and fancy that she was speaking to me. This is the secret of my love for you, Flory; and this is why I could serve you, as I would her. I can do nothing for your mother and Helen; but I can do something for you. Come home with me, and be unto me as a daughter. I am rich and childless; I am lonely and desolate; without one tie to bind me to earth. Do you come, and restore joy to my hearth, and interest to my life; and as

she was, so shall you be to me, in fortune and love."

I was about to speak, when he stopped me, saying,—

"Do not answer yet, Flory: think of it. Do not refuse! do not decide against me! for I am pleading less for you than for myself. And, apart from mere feeling, what better can you do for yourself, my child? You cannot avert or avoid the coming storm; you will rather increase its violence by adding one more to the number of sufferers. And it appears to me that there is less generosity than selfishness in such a course. The little that may be left will be surely less, shared among three, than between two; while, at my death, all which would have been Amy's shall be yours.

"You do not know what poverty is, Flory; nor the misery which its mean and bitter shifts will press upon your spirit. You cannot realize what actual want is: the lack of power to buy the daily needs of life—not its luxuries or comforts, but its bare and pinched necessities.

"You can understand buying a woollen instead of a velvet gown; but you cannot understand shivering through a freezing day in a worn-out summer muslin, for want of means to buy a poor but warmer cotton. You can understand having cold meat and a pudding, instead of many

courses and choice wines ; and a woman-servant, instead of a butler ; but you cannot understand meat being a Sunday luxury, and yourself not your own waiter only, but your cook, housemaid, and sempstress. You think of poverty as life in a cottage ornée ; elegant, but not profuse. You do not think of it as it is : a fireless grate, a scant bed, a poor meal coming seldom, and the brain and body tasked to exhaustion to find it.

“ All this has never entered your imagination : and yet this is poverty ; such as I fear you, with your mother and Helen, will feel it, if you remain together and diminish their means by division.

“ I know you will think it selfish and cowardly to seek your own comfort, leaving others sorrowful : but what better can be done ? You have no power to help ; and there is no generosity in increasing an evil by sharing it. For what I am anxious to do for you, I will do for none other of your name. You are my lost child’s image, in soul and person ; and when I see you, I have her back again.

“ Come then to me, Flory, and I will protect you as I would have done Amy ; while all that fortune and parental love can effect towards making life happy, shall be yours.”

“ Ah ! if you would make this offer to Helen,” I said, earnestly.

"*I will not.* Do not urge a request that can never be complied with. I love *you*, for the sake of her whom you so much resemble; but between Helen and me there is no tie: rather the reverse."

"You think there is no hope of keeping Ingerdyne?"

"I fear, none."

"Then my decision is made. I am very grateful for your generous offer, dear Mr. Lyle: how deeply sensible of your kindness I am, no words can express; and I am more delighted than you will now believe, to find that real and true love for me exists in any heart. But I will never leave Helen and my mother while they are in sorrow, and I can share it, or cheer or help them.

"Do not think I speak from vanity or self-confidence; but I believe that in such poverty as you have painted, I shall be useful to them. I am less likely to sink in the storm than they are; and even were it otherwise, I would still remain. I should hate myself, if I could desert my family because they were poor. If they are to be so, all the greater need for me to cling to them. I will be no summer bird."

"Nonsense! These are the heroics of a romantic girl; not the calm resolves of a wise woman. Think of it, Florence! think of it."

"I have, all the time you have been speaking;

and if I know myself, a life's deliberation would bring no different result."

"Then you despise my offer?"

"Oh, no,—no! With all my heart I thank and love you for it. I am honoured by it; and I hope you do not think me ungrateful. Were circumstances different, and you then imagined that I could make or add to your happiness at dear old Forest Home, it would be the joy of my life to go.

"If I could choose my place in the world, it would, I think, be such as you have tendered me: but it is impossible now. I am not so blind as not to see what I forfeit, in refusing you. But of that I must not think: I must do my duty, cost what it may to myself.

"Oh, do not turn away, Mr. Lyle! You know how little, except in the place itself, there is to make me happy here: that gone, you know what a prospect lies before me; and you must see that I am not choosing the path which promises most to myself. Remember, you told me long ago that mine would be a life of endurance: here, then, it begins."

"Ay! but the end! where will the end be?"

"Who can tell? Walk which way we will, we can only see the first few steps before us: the end is ever hidden. But even if I saw it, and it realized all my ideas of misery, still I think

poverty breaks the bonds of families, leaving each at liberty to seek his, or her, own advancement, regardless of others—that a poor parent or sister is less to be regarded than a rich one—and I will yield to my own wishes and inclinations, and go to Forest Home at once; thus sparing myself the pain of seeing suffering I should not share.”

There was a silence for some minutes: it was at last broken by Mr. Lyle.

“It is easy to argue plausibly when one’s feelings are cool and uninterested. You do not like Forest Home and me, or you would not argue against yourself. Well, I suppose it’s natural for young girls to like gaiety and seeing the world, better than being in a dull country-house with a superannuated old man.”

“Oh! don’t say so. It is unjust and cruel; and makes my plain duty harsher and harder to perform. I want keeping in the rugged path, not luring or taunting from it. I know I am right, because I would so much rather not do it; and because there is not upon earth a home I would so soon choose as yours. Believe me, my dear kind friend, I would rather be your child at Forest Home, than be the greatest person upon earth. But it cannot and ought not to be: and you feel that I am right, although you will not own it. Put yourself in my mother’s place, and me in your lost Amy’s, and ask how *you* would feel, if, be-

coming suddenly poor, I deserted you for a richer and more luxurious home?"

"Amy would never have done it," he answered, with a proud, angry tone.

"No; nor will I."

"Well, well!"

"No, it is not well; for one of us must be very right, and the other very wrong: the question is, which of us is right?"

"You, Flory, you!" said the old man, impetuously; "you are right. I feel it now: you ought to have decided as you have done. Still, I am bitterly disappointed, for I had set my heart upon your coming home with me; and at my age a disappointment is not easily overcome. Nevertheless, you have acted like yourself—generously and nobly. May God bless and help you in the righteous path you have chosen!"

His voice faltered as he uttered the last sentence; while I, thoroughly overcome by his sudden commendation and changed demeanour, with difficulty refrained from tears.

The manner of Mr. Lyle to me, after this evening, was very painful. He seldom spoke, but avoided me in every possible way; sometimes even rudely. He rode and walked out alone, talked almost exclusively to my mother; and, if by any chance we were left in a room together, he invariably made an excuse to leave it. I had

always been accustomed, both at Forest Home and Ingerdyne, to read aloud to him after breakfast ; but now he rose the instant the cloth was removed, and either went to his own room or drove to Abberly, upon the plea of urgent business.

All this, which was as evident as it was painful, mortified me cruelly. I knew that the decision to which I had come was right ; and yet I was punished as if I were guilty. I felt miserable, angry, and indignant. It seemed as if those early days had come back, when I used so often to be suspected of thoughts and deeds which I never either felt or did, that my spirit, roused to rebellious recklessness, disdained at last to vindicate itself.

I could have borne this patiently enough from people for whom I did not care, or for whose love and esteem I was indifferent ; but with Mr. Lyle it was otherwise. At first I was wretched, seeking opportunities for an explanation, and doing everything I could to recover the affection which I seemed so strangely to have lost. But at last, as of old, grief changed to contemptuous disregard of the opinions of one who was either too prejudiced, or too weak to judge me truly ; and in this frame of mind, frowns and smiles, cold bows and loving greetings, became alike indifferent to me.

This state of things lasted until the evening before Mr. Lyle's departure ; when it ended thus :—

I had been to the village to see a poor old woman, one of my late grandfather's pensioners. She was very ill, and having sent in vain for the clergyman (to whom, I afterwards found, her message had not been delivered), she entreated me to remain and read the Bible to her. I willingly consented, not only because I was pleased to serve her, but because I was glad to get away so long from home. So, having sent her little grandson to Ingerdyne with a note to my mother explaining where and how I was engaged, I took my place by old Mary's bed.

The scene reminded me forcibly of that similar one I had so recently witnessed at Mowbray; and as I sat by the window during the patient's short and restless sleep, and closed my eyes, it required no great exercise of imagination to fancy that the faces I had so lately watched, were near me again.

The moon, now at her full, beamed brightly through the casement, casting the shadows of the diamond-shaped panes upon the bed and floor: every corner of the little room was lighted by the pure silver radiance, while all unsightly details were either concealed or appeared even picturesque. The very atmosphere seemed holy and calm:—a fit hour for angels to visit earth and commune with mortals. The moonlight was so clear and bright, that, when the sufferer awoke, I was able to read to her without the aid of a

candle; and I continued to do so, until her daughter, bringing the night's draught, warned me that it was getting late.

"Bless you, Miss!" exclaimed the old woman, when I stood beside her bed to take leave; "bless you for reading those sweet words to me. It is not often the likes of you comes into such a poor place as this: but you come of a good family, what never forgets the sick. Your grandmother did it afore you; and you may be proud, young lady, to take after her. Mayhap I shall never see you again, for my time is short; and if so, take an old woman's blessing for all your kindness—not forgetting the greatest of all, this night's reading.

"It's a great gift you have, Miss, to read so gentle like, and sweet; the words go to the heart so. I pray you may never use this great blessing to harm yourself or another; for your voice sounds to my ears like a spirit's, and it might lead many to good. You'll excuse my freedom, I hope, Miss, for it's meant well; and think of my words when I am gone. I take leave to say them, remembering what you have read to-night, to 'do all to the glory of God.'"

In the cottage kitchen I found Mr. Lyle's old servant waiting to escort me home; and, upon inquiring how he had found me out, I learned that his master had sent him.

With my heart softened by thoughts of the scene I had just left, and with the holy words I had been reading fresh in my memory, I walked slowly and silently home. When I reached it, I found Helen reading a novel in the drawing-room; Mr. Lyle and my mother had retired to their own rooms. Supper was upon the table; it had been left for me: but I was in no mood for eating, and so, with a brief good-night to Helen, which she was too busy to notice, I went up to bed. As I closed my door, the turret clock rang out eleven sharp clanging notes.

The first thing I did was to put my candle into a corner; the next, to draw back the heavy blue curtains, throw up the window, and let in the moonlight. Not a cloud flecked the deep blue vault above, where, high and bright, as if self-poised in the heavens, shone the queenly orb in the centre of her starry court: while far and wide as the eye could range, and deeper and deeper, as long as it could penetrate the infinite space, it rested upon glittering myriads. I pondered upon the solemn beauty of the night, as I had done many a time before, until I fancied that every star was an angel's eye, keeping special watch over some mortal's fate.

Thus, dreaming and gazing, I sat by the open window, until the clock again struck. All was so still that the sound seemed to startle the birds on

their roost ; for I fancied that I heard them murmur and chirp among the branches. Thus roused to a recollection of the time, I slowly turned from the fair prospect, and drew the curtains with a resolute hand, to put temptation out of my sight.

Having replaced the candle upon the dressing table, my eye fell upon a letter, which lay before me, half hidden by the pincushion, and addressed in Mr. Lyle's handwriting. I eagerly snatched it up, tore it open, and sat down to devour its contents. They were as follows :—

“MY DEAR CHILD FLORENCE,

“Now that within a very few hours I am about to take a leave of you for years, if not for life, I find it impossible to maintain the painful distance which my own act has placed between us. I have, during the last fortnight acted with the selfish object of ensuring, as I imagined, my own comfort and peace, regardless of your duty and happiness ; and, as I deserved, have signally failed.

“You are quite right, Flory, in asserting that those who disregard the rights and claims of others, never succeed thereby in securing their own ease. The eternal law, ‘Do unto all men as ye would they should do unto you,’ is ever in force ; and its infraction is surely, if not im-

mediately punished. I have found this out. I have gone on, heedless of the pain I was inflicting upon you by my manner and words—of the injustice of making you suffer more, that I might suffer less—and, instead of succeeding, I have increased my own discomfort tenfold. I have avoided your society, trying to reconcile myself to the necessity of doing without it; seeing that for months I had dwelt upon the hope of your walking with me during the remainder of my earthly pilgrimage. I have refused myself the solace of listening to the only voice which restores the past, lest it should become too dear to me; and in all this I have sought my own happiness, forgetting yours.

“I am fitly punished; for we are now parting, perhaps for ever, and by my own selfish shortsightedness I have deprived myself of memories upon which I might have lived.

“It is too late to repine; and, I fear, too late to repair this: all that I can do, therefore, is to make this confession, and ask you, for its sake, to forgive the unkindness of an old man, whose love for one he looks upon as the representative of his lost child, has led him into unintentional cruelty.

“And now, farewell. By what I have felt during the last few days, I can judge what I shall suffer when I have left Ingerdyne for ever.

It will be like a second parting with the dead—an opening of wounds, scarred, but not healed, by ten years endurance. Yet, I freely acknowledge that you are right. You have chosen the straight and narrow path; and, although I suffer by it, I admire you the more for your integrity. So perverse is human nature, that if you had decided otherwise, I might have been better pleased, but I should have loved and honoured you less.

“Ever through life, my child, do as you have done in this case: act as fearlessly, as unselfishly, and as generously; and in your own heart you will be amply rewarded, even if others refuse to do your motives justice.

♣ And now one word more.—Should circumstances change, and a father’s roof be needful to your comfort or happiness, come to me. While I live, Forest Home will have open doors for you; and when I die, you will find that you were not forgotten.

“Do not allude to this letter in the morning; only let me see you wear this ring, and I shall know that all is peace between us.

“Once more, farewell! The blessing of a childless old man be with you through life!

“Write to me soon, and ever believe me,

“Your affectionate and faithful friend,

“HORACE LYLE.”

My first impulse upon reading this letter, was to go to the writer, and upon my knees confess all *my* sins of thought against *him*; and with the tears which now dimmed my eyes beseech *his* pardon.

All that I had called unjust and cruel during the past fortnight was forgotten. *He* was blameless, and I had been captious, unreasonable, and ridiculous. What had *he* done, and what had I not done, in my conceited self-estimation, to make and widen the breach for which he had unjustly blamed himself? All that I had so ungratefully forgotten in my absurd assertion of dignity, was now remembered: and the memory of his generosity, courtesy, patience, and affection touched me more deeply than ever. I hated myself; and gladly would I have humbled myself to the dust before him, could I have blotted out from my conscience the recollection of the last few arrogant days.

Sitting down to think and reason like a rational being, was out of the question; and, with the letter in my hand, I walked up and down the room until the second sharp stroke of early morning rang out in the silence.

The next day I was down stairs very early, hoping to see Mr. Lyle alone; but I was disappointed: he did not join the breakfast party until he had been twice summoned, and then he came

with a packet of unopened letters, as if by reading them he could escape conversation.

He spoke very little during the meal, and when it was over, made a hurried apology to my mother for retiring to his room, for the purpose, as he said, of inspecting the packing of his travelling trunk ; and, without a syllable to Helen or me, he left the table abruptly.

"Mr. Lyle's very odd to-day, I think," said Helen. "He seems quite tired of you, Flory ; or else you quarrelled coming down. Pray, did he offer his juvenile self to your acceptance, and have you affronted the dear child by refusing, saying, 'You're o'er young to marry yet?'"

"For shame, Helen!" I said, angrily, as she sang the last words in her mimicking voice. "How dare you speak so impertinently? You seem to forget all that we owe to Mr. Lyle."

"No, I don't. Though why I'm to be grateful for his scaring away a pleasant, talkative, good-natured individual like Mr. Comyn, and putting himself and his travelling trunks in his place, I confess, I don't see at present: but live and learn, Floribel, eh?"

And making a grimace, exaggerating with admirable fidelity a particularly grave look of Mr. Lyle, Helen ran out of the room: while I remained, to recall, over and over again, the glance

of gratified and paternal affection with which, when he first entered the room, he had greeted the sight of the brilliant ring upon my finger.

Notwithstanding that he was going, I felt contented and happy ; for there is something in reconciliation, as in confession, which not only eases the heart, but quiets it too. And my spirit was at rest : filled with the deep tranquil satisfaction of being at perfect peace with one to whom I felt all a daughter's love.

It was autumn now ; that loveliest time of all the year when it is bright and sunny, and the dreariest and saddest of any when it is gusty and wet.

This was a glorious day. The walks were covered with sere leaves blown off during the night, and the little breeze which still remained made them dance up and down, or chase each other under the edges of the grass plat and shrubbery borders where they had hidden. The sun was bright as in summer, but not oppressive ; the sky clear and blue as if it were one vast sapphire dome, and the air brisk and light. On every tree and shrub, from branch to branch hung festoons of gossamer, gemmed with millions of dew-drops ; whilst over the open space continually floated long slender lines of the fragile and beautiful webs, which covered the grass like a veil. The remaining leaves were yellow, and many of the

trees were nearly bare ; while from the Siberian crabs and plum trees, which here and there peeped out from the more elegant shrubs, their summer covering was entirely stripped ; and the golden and ruby fruit alone enriched the branches. Every now and then the sharp cracks of a double-barrelled gun came from the stubble and turnip lands round ; and as the dogs heard it, in their lazy lounge upon the great hall-mats, they looked up and pricked their ears intelligently.

Surrounded by all these sights and sounds, I stood gazing idly and dreamily at a gorgeous dahlia—they had only just come in then—when Mr. Lyle's carriage turned out from the courtyard, and drew up to the hall-door.

A minute after, I heard Helen's voice calling me ; another, and I was standing before our visitor with my hands locked in his, and with no power to reply to or acknowledge the blessing, which in broken tones he solemnly invoked upon me from Heaven.

A few more seconds, and he was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

SIX weeks after this, Ingerdyne passed from our hands for ever. The mortgagee took possession, and the home of our ancestors was ours no longer.

The first terrible shock over, I was startled to find how helpless and paralyzed my mother continued. She was like an infant; as irrational and as dependent. She could do nothing but imagine improbabilities, and weep or be angry at their non-fulfilment. Helen, too, was ever in extremes of grief or indifference: one hour crying as if her heart was broken; the next, fancying some bewitching bonnet or mantle. Thus associated, difficulties were hard indeed to bear and surmount; and before many days had passed, I thought that martyrdom would be bliss compared to a life so spent.

As soon as it was known how matters stood, several creditors whose judgments already ob-

tained had hung threateningly over my father's head for months, now put them into force ; and in a few days no less than four executions were in the house. What a wretched, desecrated place was Ingerdyne then ! No corner was sacred from intrusion : no room so private that we could call it our own, or resent the continued " looking in " of some one or other of the officials who over-ran the place.

No wonder that my mother was indignant, and half broken-hearted ; but she was unfortunately so unacquainted with business and its marble forms, that she could neither be silent nor civil to the herd of low vulgar men about her : she treated them with undisguised scorn and contempt ; consequently, in less than a week, they had learned to dislike her so much, that, instead of trying to render their presence less painful to her, they made common cause and annoyed her in every possible way.

Sick at heart, upbraided by my mother for not doing as she did, and perpetually appealed to by the officials, I led a most miserable life. At last, to my unspeakable relief, my mother determined to go to London and seek my father ; and, *in propria personâ*, see what could be done. Helen was to go too ; and having prevailed upon our surgeon's wife—an old lady of sixty, who had never been admitted within our doors before—

to remain with me during her absence, my mother left Ingerdyne.

It was a bitter November morning. A fog, so dense as to be almost palpable to the touch, hung over the face of the earth, and the horses' breath steamed against the yellow vapour like a cloud. The trees dripped with moisture, and the frost-bitten shrubs hung their perished heads, as if in utter weariness of life. Everything looked dreary, forlorn, and wretched: the moat was covered with dead leaves, the walks were heaped up in all corners with the same evidences of decay, for the dead flowers had not been removed, and even the hardy Michaelmas daisies drooped. To this universal desolation there was but one exception;—a monthly rose, upon whose hardy stem one half-blown flower still lingered—the solitary smile in this sad wilderness.

Strangely to me sounded Helen's gay laugh and congratulatory exclamation, as she followed my mother into the post-chaise. She seemed to feel neither sorrow nor misgiving: the visit to London was the all-in-all of the moment, and beyond it she neither looked nor thought.

Not so my mother: she wept bitterly; seeming to feel instinctively that she was gazing her last upon the home of her childhood. She never spoke, but signed to me to gather the rose I have mentioned; and then with a slow inclination of the

head to the watchful postboy, bade him by that gesture drive on.

Every day, now, Ingerdyne was besieged by creditors; from whose bitter complaints it appeared that nothing had been paid to them for years, but that, time after time, they had been put off with specious promises, not one of which had ever been fulfilled. Inquiries were hourly made for my father's address; a request with which I had no more power to comply than the veriest stranger: for my mother and Helen had as yet seen nothing of him, and were staying with an old friend of the family in London.

Meanwhile, affairs were progressing rapidly to a close. No offer having been made to pay the execution creditors, a day was fixed and advertised for the sale of the furniture, plate, &c., at Ingerdyne.

The paper containing the advertisement was laid upon my table by an unknown hand; no one even among those rough men being hard-hearted enough to present it to me.

For a moment I was stunned. A blow, even when it is expected, always seems to fall suddenly; and such a one as this was heavy enough to excuse more than usual cowardice.

Happily for human nature, however, this state seldom lasts long: we awaken from the crushing sense of calamity, to prepare for the action

which must follow, and in the exertion find relief.

I had never been much of a dreamer, except in seasons of peace or intervals of ease; and now the magnitude of the event effectually precluded repose. As soon, therefore, as the first shock was over, I wrote to my mother; to the attorney whose address my father had given me, when I was in town; and to Mr. Lyle, whose last letter was dated from Naples.

From the first, I speedily received a letter full of hopeless sorrow. She had not seen my father, but she had received an undated note from him, bearing an Irish post-mark, saying that, as he found things had come to the worst at Ingerdyne, he thought the creditors would be more tractable if he were out of the way, and would more easily come into any arrangement that could be offered. What arrangement he contemplated, however, he did not say; and his wife, left completely in the dark, was desponding and miserable.

From the attorney, too, I soon heard; but in an equally unsatisfactory strain: he wrote courteously, although in a tone of displeasure; saying that he had so often been made instrumental in proposing arrangements which his principal had never carried out, that he must decline interfering any further, in affairs which promised so ill.

Hope of aid from both these sources was now

cut off, and I felt that to be longer without the advice and assistance of some professional man was impossible. Still I knew no one to whom I could apply, and was beginning to think of writing again to London, when it flashed across my memory that Mr. Spencer, my grandfather's solicitor, had a son practising at Abberly. To him therefore I went, and finding him at home, entered a lawyer's office for the first time in my life.

He was writing when I was ushered in, and not hearing any name announced, continued to bend over his desk; not even raising his eyes. But when, rather tired of waiting, I spoke at last, he started up hastily, and I recognised the face of a gentleman I knew well as a visitor at Comberton.

"Mr. Ashurst!" I exclaimed, as he came forward.

"The same," he answered gaily, offering me his hand; "and very much at your service."

"Thank you; but I came to see Mr. Spencer, the solicitor."

"Then I am still more at your commands, for I am Mr. Spencer, the solicitor."

"His partner?"

"No, his veritable self."

"That's impossible."

"In plain English you mean it's a fabrication. But it is no such thing. I am Frank Spencer, attorney and solicitor of High Abberly."

"I thought your name was Ashurst. For some reason or other, you've been sailing under false colours. Excuse me, but who are you, really?"

"I'll tell you presently, when you have done me the honour to be seated.—Clients always sit, you know; it's more dignified.—There now, I'll retreat behind my desk and open this great book, by way of impressing you, and any other confiding victim who may come in, with my studious habits, and proceed to enlighten you. Though first, I must let my mother know. You will take some luncheon with her, after business."

"No, thank you, I ——"

"Everybody says 'no thank you,' and means 'yes, certainly.' That's as well understood in enlightened society as the correctness of a railway directors' half-yearly account, or the sincerity of a lawyer's grief at being instructed by his richest client to file a bill in Chancery against a joint-stock bank. But the practice is rather commonplace, I think: I am surprised you patronize it."

"Why? I was never famous for originality, you know. But really you must excuse my accepting your invitation to-day, for my business is urgent—and extremely painful."

"I grieve to hear it," he said, becoming grave at once, and drawing a chair opposite to me. "Can I serve you? If I can, command me."

I'm not always such a rattle-pate as you might fancy."

"Oh, I know that very well. I've seen you often at Aston thoughtful enough for a judge, Mr. — what *is* your name?"

"Spencer. I took it to oblige my uncle, and to succeed to his fortune. My father, General Ashurst, who was killed during the Peninsular war, married your old friend Mr. Spencer's sister; and when she died I was left to his care. I believe I was a sad pickle in those days, worrying my good uncle and aunt to death; but happily he managed to reform me tolerably, and I am free to own, that whatever little good there is in me is of my uncle's making, whatever bad is my own undisputed property."

"I thought a moment since that you spoke of my lunching with your mother, and now you say she is dead: you are really very mysterious!"

"I call Mrs. Spencer—my uncle's good old wife, who brought me up—mother: and a better one no man ever had. But to return to our muttuns,—what is the matter? What can I do to serve you?"

"Listen patiently to what I am going to tell you, and then direct me, if you can."

My request was implicitly obeyed. During the whole of my long rambling story Mr. Spencer never interrupted me by a single word, but let me

tell my tale in my own way—a golden rule when a man wants to get at the truth of a thing—and after displaying as much interest as any mortal not immediately concerned in the matter could do, said, when I had concluded,—

“And all this time have you had no adviser? no lawyer, I mean?”

“No.”

“Then it is quite time you had, things have gone on in their own way too long already. Cannot you procure your father’s address by writing to his agents? He ought to be down himself: he is the proper person to act. It’s a vile cowardly thing, leaving you here alone to bear all this: it’s infamous—I never heard of such a proceeding.”

“Perhaps not; but as the world progresses, strange things do and will happen. The question now is, what can be done? Or rather, what can *you* do to help me? for my idea is, that in depending upon my father we rely upon a broken reed, and that whatever is to be done, must be done without him.”

“And your mother, where is she? Surely she is to be found: they cannot both have left you to do their work.”

“My mother is in London. You must have paid very little heed to what I have been telling you, if you have not discovered how incapable she

is of contending with such a rude storm as this. She is far too gentle for such rough work."

"And what are you? Are you so well accustomed to bailiffs and sheriff's officers, that their presence has become indifferent to you?"

"No, of course not; but I am younger, and,——"

"And therefore all the less fit for it. What on earth can people in their senses expect you to do in such dilemmas as these? They run away themselves, frightened to death, and leave you, as if you had no feeling, to fight with difficulties out of which even I, a lawyer, can see no way."

"Oh, do not say so! Don't say that nothing can be done, or I shall lose all courage. I have so hoped that, even at the last hour, means might be found of saving Ingerdyne from this terrible disgrace, that I believe I could bear up no longer if that stay were struck down."

"But what *can* be hoped for? What chance is there of affairs taking a favourable turn? As far as I can judge from your statement, these men are in legal possession; and having once obtained it and advertised a sale, it will require something tantamount to a miracle to rescue the property from them."

"Indeed! Have they a right to sell everything in this way?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But I will go back with

you to Ingerdyne, if it will be any satisfaction to you, and see that no unfair advantage has been taken. Shall I do so? Would you like it?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what? If you wish it, there is no 'but' in the matter. In fact, you have no right to a will at all: having consulted me, you are bound to follow my advice. So come up to my mother, and, while you have some luncheon, I will finish my letters for the post, and order my horses."

As soon as we reached Ingerdyne, Mr. Spencer summoned into the library each one of the officers in possession, and when the long interviews with them were over, returned to tell me that everything had been done in due form, and that nothing but the power to pay their claims could release me from them.

Every day now until the sale, and nearly all the day, Mr. Spencer passed at Ingerdyne. Every trouble and annoyance from which he could protect me, he continued to ward off; and when my heart and hopefulness sank under the weight of present grief, and future care, he cheered and encouraged me, until the dark cloud passed.

He also arranged that, after the sale was over, I should be his mother's guest, until something could be ascertained of my father's means and intentions; and the kind old lady, whom until lately I had never seen, urged

an acceptance of her hospitality with the most generous warmth.

Yet he sat far away. During the whole of the dinner I never stirred from his little sitting-room, which when I think I meet to run by at night, looking for "Doris" soon in the doorway. But when evening fell, my gloomy reverie was broken by one of the auctioneer's men, who came in to make the last notice upon the furniture.

"I wait a long, Miss," he said civilly, as I rose from my chair, and turned to leave the room. But I could not remain: I felt that my change was giving way, and I did not choose that he should see it.

This evening was full and wet. The rooms were all deserted, for the men had gathered together in the servants' hall, and were carousing.

With a desperate resolution I compelled myself to go through every chamber. The first was the library. I had seen it two days before, but now I hardly knew it: the carpet had been taken up, the books were out of their cases, tied together and lotted; the tables, reading-desks, globes, and sofas were all ranged against the walls; the curtains were rolled up high, the book-case doors thrown wide open, and every article was ticketed.

Oh, how desolate it looked! how unlike itself! I stood at the door and gazed miserably round. There were the great arm-chairs, worked by an

industrious ancestress; every gigantic rose and monstrous tulip upon which I had known from babyhood. I almost recognised the very one upon which I had fallen asleep the evening of my last return from Ireland, when my grandfather had roused me from my frightful dream. I almost fancied that I saw and heard him now; and, sick at heart, I passed quickly through the room, and went down the little oak stairs into the dining-room.

All was the same there. Upon the dark, bright tables and sideboards, stared the little white tickets of the auctioneer; and in the drawing-room I found a group of people from the town (friends, probably, of some of the officers) examining the furniture, and making observations upon its quality and condition. As I entered the room, they looked up, but took no further notice. I was a cypher to them, their interest being absorbed in the couches and ornaments.

With that unaccountable impulse which often leads one to gaze upon painful objects, I remained in a recess, listening to their conversation as they walked about the room and commented upon its fittings. I felt a morbid pleasure in hearing all they had to say, and learning how we were looked upon in the world outside our gates. After a time, however, they went away; and I wandered about, until I found myself in the nursery. It

come, I sank down upon a stray chair, and burst into tears.

In a moment after, I became aware of the presence of some other person in the room, and then a voice close to me, said gently,—

“I was afraid of this. You promised not to come here.”

I did not reply, for the sympathy of the tone completely destroyed the little fortitude that was left, and I wept without restraint. I had felt so forlorn, that the sudden change unnerved me.

“Oh, Florence! Florence! this is dreadful,” said Mr. Spencer, calling me by my Christian name for the first time in his life. “I cannot bear to see you suffer thus: you will kill yourself. If you have any pity, spare me this misery. Now at the very last, when you have borne up so bravely all along, do not give way thus. Remember how we all depend upon you.”

“I cannot help it! Only go away and leave me; I shall be better soon.”

“No, you will not: you have been too much alone already. You are worn and harassed to death; and you want sympathy and society, not solitude. You must go home with me: my mother expects you; for she absolutely forbade my returning alone, and I have brought her little carriage to drive you back.”

“No, no, it is impossible. I cannot leave here

what I might have known. I could not bear to dwell on it at that time."

"Forgive me, Florence, but this is romance: very much very much more so than. What good can it do any? What wrong can you prevent? None. I do not expose yourself to needless pain and personal insult. Among the many people who will do such a service, there will not be one who will appreciate your motive for rendering such help to them. Thinking it arises from a true & necessary & disinterested spirit, will treat you accordingly. Forgive me for speaking thus, but you are more anxious to hear the truth; and I—I—like you so well, as to prefer disappointing you at a moment, or concealing it from you."

"But no one will suffer except myself, even if I am misunderstood, and I should so like to stay till the very last," I said, hesitatingly.

"And so you should it, either for yourself or Ingerdyne, your stay could do any good. But it will not. You are already excited beyond your own control, and as ill as you well can be; while Ingerdyne is past all help from either of us."

Still I lingered; and then he said, taking my hand to lead me away, "Come, Florence! make an effort; and, as children say, it will soon be over. Come!"

"I cannot go without seeing the house once more."

"Very well, then, we will go round together. So come, take my arm, and you shall have your whim."

And so, silently and passively, I went again through the whole house. Not a room, not a closet, not a window that was not individually dear to me—not one to which some childish association did not cling. And yet I neither spoke nor wept as we passed them by; until, as we were leaving the library, I turned to look at it for the last time. Then came thronging back a host of sights and memories—visions of the dead and absent;—sounds of many voices,—gleaming lights in their places of old,—and mournful unearthly noises—all the fancies of my own brain and eye, yet not the less bewildering; and, uttering a low cry, I fainted.

CHAPTER X.

IN a fortnight the sale was over; and when the accounts and claims of the execution creditors were sent in to Mr. Spencer, they were found to be so immense, that their expenses and demands left nothing to be divided amongst the rest of the claimants; and of course nothing remained for ourselves: Ingerdyne was gone, and we were absolutely homeless, and all but penniless.

My father was still in Ireland, but in what part we knew not; my mother and Helen were staying with the friend to whose house they had first gone, and I was at Abberly. Thus scattered, we felt forlorn and helpless. The worst had come at last, and was to be met; but how?

I knew very well that little, if not absolutely nothing, was to be expected from either my father or mother. The unhappy connections formed by the first, would effectually prevent the revival of that care for his family, which had so long been dying away; and the last was so utterly powerless and depressed, that it was idle

to expect energy from her. Upon Helen and me then rested everything, and (Heaven help us !) what could we do ?

Yet that something must be done, and that quickly, was evident ; for when the little pittance which each of us possessed was gone, there remained no source, save in our own exertions, from which we could replenish our store.

True, Mrs. Spencer had urged me, with all the delicacy and tenderness of a sincere friend, to remain with her ; assuring me that my society had become too dear for her to relinquish. But much as I honoured and esteemed her, and welcome as was the peace of her quiet and well-appointed household after the stormy scenes of the past summer, yet I felt that duty imperatively negatived her proposal, and summoned me to my mother.

Under this conviction I wrote to London, promising to join my mother the instant she chose to call for me ; but many days elapsed without bringing a reply, and when at last it did come, it was couched in such upbraiding terms as stung me cruelly. My mother charged me with selfishness in deserting her, now that her power of indulging me in the luxuries to which I had been accustomed was gone, and bade me cease to trouble myself about her, since her dutiful child Helen remained to comfort and support her.

My first impulse upon reading this letter was indignation, the next sorrow. How unjust these accusations were, my own conscience told me: why had I rejected Mr. Lyle's offer, and Mrs. Spencer's, if I so lightly regarded the claims of my family? Why had I endured alone the tortures of the last month, if I was so careless of their feelings? My mother's injustice embittered my lot, and saddened my heart. Oh, what wretchedness did not this captious spirit augur for us all! Who could tell where it would stop, or who else might be the sufferer? It might deprive us, perhaps, of some of the few friends who yet were left. What a life of miserable endurance lay outstretched before us all! On one side dissatisfaction and suspicion, on the other depression and resentment. The prospect was indeed gloomy, and I felt dispirited and unhappy.

For some time after breakfast I sat holding the letter in my hand, my heart full of mingled anger and sorrow. I had just resolved upon going instantly to town, when Mr. Spencer entered the room, and leaning upon the chimneypiece, by which I sat, asked me,—

“What news from home? Is Captain Sackville *non est* still?”

I gave him the letter. When he had read it, he drew a chair beside me, saying,—

“Exactly what might be expected; but not

the less unjust and untrue. Surely, after this epistle, you will not persist in your determination to go to London. Your mother is perfectly satisfied with the daughter she has, therefore there is no earthly necessity for you to trouble her: indeed, it seems to me that she rather wishes to decline your visit."

"So she may now; but I know Helen better than she does. Helen has no greater power of enduring hardship and poverty than —; in short, she is too sensitive and delicate to bear trouble; and I shall be wanted soon, if not now."

"Yes; but I see no sort of reason why you are to throw yourself away, and wear out your life in the service of relatives, who at best will only not reproach you. Florence, you are better worth——"

"It's a pity, then, I cannot persuade people to think so," I rejoined, testily.

As I spoke, my companion rose suddenly from his chair, went to the window, looked out for a few seconds, then returned hastily and sat down again.

I was too busy with my own thoughts to heed his restless movements, until he said, in a low voice, his head bent forward the while as if to watch the gyration of the feather-brush which he twirled energetically between the palms of the hands that hung across his knees,—

"Florence, have you never thought that the willingness to serve your family, for which you have so often condescended to thank me, springs from some other source than regard for them?"

"No! what other source can it have?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"I am afraid not. I am not very happy this morning, and my brain is not particularly inventive."

"Do you really believe that it was for the sake of Captain and Mrs. Sackville, and to help them, that I have done what little I have, in their affairs lately?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then you are wrong. It was for *you*, wholly and entirely. I did not intend to have told you so yet, often as it has trembled on my lips; lest it might seem ungenerous to press a selfish suit in your day of sorrow. But that letter leaves me no choice: I must speak and know my fate at once. You seem astonished, Florence: surely you have suspected my secret; surely you must have felt that love for you alone has urged and guided all my actions."

As he spoke a new light broke upon me, making my brain reel and my whole frame tremble. How plain and instinct with meaning were many things now, that hitherto had seemed matters of course, and how miserably blind I had been! Until this

very moment, the idea of what had come to pass had never entered my imagination; and yet how clearly I saw now, that I might and ought to have seen it from the first. Absorbed in my own thoughts and sorrow, how culpably short-sighted I had been!

Something of the shame and mortification I felt, must have been written in my face, for he continued,—

“Can it be possible that you are surprised, Florence? that you were not prepared for this? My attentions——”

“Ought to have been understood, I acknowledge it with shame; but, indeed, they were not. I never suspected that your kindness to me arose from any other feeling than compassion for my forlorn and helpless state; and the idea that you regarded me in any light beyond that of a mere acquaintance, never once occurred to me.”

“But now that you do know it, Florence; that I tell you the happiness of my whole life is in your hands—that existence will be to me a blank unless you share it—now you will give me hope of different thoughts, will you not? Seeing how inexpressibly dear you are to me, you will allow a longer acquaintance to win for me that place in your affections which I would gladly give half my life to obtain; and without which, life will be valueless.”

"Oh, do not say so!" I replied, mournfully: "you have known me so short a time, that I cannot be of consequence to you; and when I am gone, this passing fancy, which is more than half pity, will die away."

"Never!"

"Indeed, it will. You are sorry for me now, and you think that a more lasting feeling influences you; but when I have left you, you will speedily forget me, and rejoice that my blindness has saved you from yourself."

As I spoke, he started from his chair, walked impatiently across the room, then returned, and standing before me, said, in a voice husky with suppressed emotion,—

"Florence! listen to me."

I looked up, for the tones were so strange that I was startled. His face, usually so pale, was flushed and resolute; his eyes flashing, and upon his lofty brow and temples the blue veins stood in high relief. An extraordinary change seemed to have come over him; and (as I had been years before, with my cousin Philip) I was frightened into silence.

"Florence, listen to me!" he said, "and strive to believe me; for even for the short acquaintance of which only you are willing to allow me the benefit, you seem to know strangely little of me. I have told you that I love you—that the joy or

desolation of my whole life lies in your power—and you appear to doubt and disbelieve me: mocking my earnest words with an assurance that ere long I shall be thankful that you did so.

“This may be mere maiden modesty, or false appreciation of your own worth; and if so, oh, how humbly and joyfully I shall sue for pardon of my misapprehension! But if not, tell me, Florence, what false seeming have you found in me, which should give you a right to say, that in offering you my heart and seeking yours in return, I do but offer and ask what I neither wish to give, nor care to gain.”

He paused, fixing upon mine his large indignant eyes. Never before had he looked so handsome and so worthy of respect as then he did, standing there in his angry vindication. For the first time, I really admired him. Hitherto, I had thought him good and kind, but tame-spirited and commonplace; and now in this fiery outbreak I scarcely recognised him. I was embarrassed and grieved, and replied with difficulty,—

“Forgive me, if I have offended you! I did not intend to do so. But in my present circumstances, portionless and forlorn, without even the poor dowry of my family’s good name, it seemed impossible that any one should choose but shun me.”

The words came laggingly, for I was very

wretched, and the tears which pride forbade to fall, impeded my utterance.

In an instant he was by my side again; all vehemence had subsided, and with a voice low and pitying as the tones one listens to in dreams, he exclaimed,—

“Forgive *me*, Florence! forgive the rash and hasty words which have caused you pain, and made you do yourself so much injustice as to believe that fortune or popularity could add to the value of your own true worth. What to me, or to any one who desired your love, is fortune or position compared with yourself, your generous nature, and unselfish heart? Oh, Florence, dearest! he who loves you once will love you ever; and you will be as precious to him though dowered by poverty itself, as if you were the heiress of millions. For myself, dearest, I can only see in the reasons you have assigned as sufficient cause for the loss of friends, so many grounds why those who loved you before, should cherish you now more kindly still. But if some think otherwise, fear not, Florence, nor heed them; only trust yourself to me, and as far as human power avails to shield you from sorrow or annoyance, mine shall be exerted till you learn to think that grief is but a poet’s fiction.”

As he spoke he took my hand, and the action roused me from the half-dreamy state into which

I had fallen. I was so thoroughly wretched, so heart-stung by my mother's letter, so miserable and shame-stricken still, at the memory of the last few weeks at Ingerdyne, so hopeless and desponding for the future, that I felt as if all I cared for on earth would be the privilege to lie down and die. And now, to add to all this, was the grief of finding that I was about to return evil for good, and give pain to the most generous heart and truest friend I could ever hope to meet. For noble, honourable, excellent as he was, I did not love him; and, though I was careless of my own fate, yet I felt that he deserved better at my hands, than to be suffered to link himself to one whose heart and affections were so entirely uninterested as mine.

With all these emotions filling my heart at once, no wonder that I was so bewildered as scarcely to be conscious of what was being said, and that it required something more than words, to rouse me from my trance-like apathy.

This was supplied by the pressure of my hand; when with a sudden start, which after my passive silence must have seemed like delirium, I rose from my seat, and shaking off Mr. Spencer's touch, exclaimed rapidly,—

“It is impossible! With my whole heart I am grateful to you, and deeply, truly sensible of the honour of your preference; but forgive me that I

THINK THAT I DO NOT THANK YOU FOR HAVING
 BROUGHT ME INTO THESE SITUATIONS OF WHICH, NO
 DOUBT, YOU WERE IN MY OWN MINDS, I
 NEVER SUSPECTED THE CAUSE. THE INSTANT WORK YOU
 COULD SPEAK TO ME IN THE SILENCE AND SORROW
 THAT I FELT, NOT MAKE ME UNDERSTAND MYSELF MORE
 DISADVANTAGED: NO, INDEED, I AM LESS CULPABLE THAN
 SUPPOSED. HAD CIRCUMSTANCES BEEN DIFFERENT—
 WERE MY HEART—”

“AND IS IT NOT, FLORENCE? SURELY I HAVE NOT
 BEEN DECEIVED!” HE EXCLAIMED, VEHEMENTLY.

I FELT THE ANGRY BLOOD RUSH TO MY BROW AT THIS
 IMPLIED ACCUSATION: BUT A MOMENT’S REFLECTION
 SHOWED ME THE INJUSTICE OF SUCH A FEELING, AND I
 REPLIED,—

“YOU MISUNDERSTAND ME. SITUATED AS I NOW
 AM, I WILL NEVER MARRY. MANY YEARS, IF NOT THE
 WHOLE OF MY LIFE, MUST BE DEVOTED TO MY MOTHER.
 WHILE SHE IS IN SORROW, NOTHING BUT HER OWN COM-
 MANDS SHALL PART US. I WILL AND OUGHT TO LABOUR
 FOR HER; AND, EVEN WERE IT TO SECURE MY OWN
 HAPPINESS, I WILL NEVER CONSENT TO ACCEPT A HOME
 FROM WHICH SHE AND HELEN WOULD BE EXCLUDED;
 NOR TO BURTHEN MY HUSBAND WITH MY FAMILY.
 THEREFORE, UPON THIS GROUND, HAD I NO OTHER, I
 MUST, ALTHOUGH MOST GRATEFUL FOR THE HONOUR YOU
 HAVE DONE ME, DECLINE IT ABSOLUTELY AND FOR EVER.”

“OH, NOT FOR EVER, FLORENCE! NOT FOR EVER!
 GIVE ME SOME HOPE: SOME CHEERING WORD TO CLING

to; something to live for. Say that you do not despise me; that in time you may——”

“I shall be still the same; forgive my plain speaking, but I have done you too much wrong already to deceive you now. Twenty years hence, as to-day, I believe that my reply will be the same.”

A short silence followed, which was broken by the sound of Mrs. Spencer's voice in the hall, speaking to some one as she came towards the breakfast-room door.

This caused Mr. Spencer to say, hastily, although sorrowfully,—

“One word more, Florence, and I will be silent. I am sure that you will answer me frankly, if only for the sake of the last few weeks delusive happiness. Am I pleading for a treasure already given? Is your heart bestowed upon another?”

“No.”

“Then, despite of all you have said, I will hope on. Time is God's great agent here; not only for righting wrongs, but for bringing unlooked-for things to pass. And constancy is even now sometimes rewarded; so I will take for my motto those resolute words on the ancient seal, and ‘while I breathe, I'll hope.’ Fear not that I shall blame you, even in thought, if, through my own wilfulness, my life passes thus fruitlessly away; the last few weeks have been as a life to me, and in them

I have laid the foundation of a love that will only expire with life itself. I cannot give it up at will; nor would I, if I could. This is my unchangeable resolve; but from this hour you shall hear it no more. I will press my suit no farther, but trust to time and your own heart: both, after a while, will, I think, plead for me. And to what you have said respecting your mother and Helen, I reply thus: thanks to my good uncle, I am rich, not enough to purchase and keep up Ingerdyne in the style your father did, but quite enough to make my wife so far independent, that from her own income she can maintain in perfect comfort those who rely upon her for a daughter's and sister's love. And when, won over by my constant affection, she has learned to love me well enough in return—to believe that her joys and sorrows are mine, and that to give her pleasure will be to insure my own; then I shall hope that, seeing her family is mine also, she will never dream that I can feel them a burthen."

Before I could reply, the door opened, and Mrs. Spencer entered, saying,—

"Frank, have you forgotten your promise to drive Florence and me to H—— to-day? the horses have been standing at the door for nearly half an hour."

"Indeed, I had, mother. But I shall be ready now before either of you. I have only to write a

letter to my agent, and then I shall be at your service."

As soon as he had left the room, the good old lady turned to me, exclaiming,—

"How ill you look, my dear! you are as pale as a ghost. And how cold your hands are! dear me, I hope you've not got this nasty fever that's about. I really must speak to Frank and tell him to drive us first to Dr. Seaforth's (he was telling me only yesterday that he had thirty cases of fever on his list), and then if he finds you have any of the symptoms, we can return instantly. It's a dreadful time of year for fever. I've known one beginning now, hang about a person for months. I'll go and see Frank directly."

And without waiting for a reply, she hurried out of the room, and by the direction of her retreating footsteps, I knew that she was gone to the study.

To prophesy, and then to nurse an illness, was Mrs. Spencer's hobby; and I knew that a series of visits from her pet physician, teapots full of herb tea, days in my own room, and nights under the vigilant care of her sleepless maid, would all fall to my lot; unless I convinced her, by the activity of my movements, that, from whatever else I might be suffering, low fever was certainly not "hanging about me."

Accordingly I ran quickly up stairs, and with a

celerity very strongly at variance with the heaviness of my heart, dressed myself in the most elaborate costume I possessed ; hoping, with the aid of furs and lace, a muffling veil and pink bonnet-lining, to give my pale face a less ghastly hue, and my drooping figure a less invalidish appearance.

To my great satisfaction I succeeded admirably ; Mrs. Spencer being obliged to confess that—
“ though there was evidently something serious in the matter, yet that it certainly had not the character of low fever.”



CHAPTER XI.

DURING our drive, I obtained the relief of silence by the introduction into the carriage of a nervous friend of my hostess, whose complaints were endless, and formed an inexhaustible topic of conversation between herself and her sympathizing companion. After the first few sentences of general greeting, the reverie into which I naturally fell after the late painful interview with Mr. Spencer, was not interrupted by a single word from either of my neighbours, and I had ample leisure to reflect and determine upon the necessity of leaving Abberly the next day. I felt that it was now impossible to stay; and, although my welcome in London was more than doubtful, still I owed it to my own delicacy to proceed thither at once.

But, like many other wise and well-laid plans, this was doomed to disappointment; for Mr. Spencer had scarcely joined his mother and myself

after dinner, when the evening mail came in, bringing with it the following letter from Helen :—

DEAR FLOR.,

Mamma desires me to write and tell you, that she has accepted for me and herself, Mrs. Malin's delightful invitation to spend the winter with her in Brighton. She has taken a darling house there, in the most fashionable situation, and we went yesterday to Long Acre to choose a pony carriage, which I am to learn to drive on the Parade. I am so happy. Mrs. Malin says everybody is in Brighton now, so we shall have parties continually. I can't think how you like remaining at that stupid Abberly: but you and I never were alike, and mamma says the country suits you best, as you can ride all day long there if you choose; and Mrs. Malin says she's sure that you and she wouldn't suit each other at all. As soon as we are settled, I will write; but I suppose you will have no time for letters now. I am just going with Mrs. Malin to fix upon the colours for the carriage lining, so good-bye.

Yours affectionately,

HELEN.

P.S.—I open my letter again, in a great hurry, to ask you to lend me those nice pearls that Mr.

Lyle gave you. I will take great care of them, and you will be certain not to want them at that horrid stupid Abberly. Send them here, and I will get Mrs. Malin to give orders that the parcel is sent down to Brighton.

For a long time I sat speechless, gazing on this heartless epistle. I could not think: like waves, my thoughts came rolling on one after another, each new one obliterating the last; till my mind, agonized with its conflicting emotions, seemed to give way at once; and with an unconscious cry of utter misery, I fell back upon the sofa on which I sat, and, covering my face with my hands, clasped my beating temples closely.

In an instant Mr. Spencer, who had been watching me attentively, was beside me: while his mother followed, exclaiming,—

“Dear me! dear me! Florence, darling, what is the matter? Is it that letter? Read it, Frank, and see if——No, I don’t mean that; but what is it, love?”

I could not reply: words and tears, either of which might have relieved me, were denied. I sat like a statue; and although my brain ached madly with the consciousness of grief, yet my ideas were so confused, that even to myself I could not define what had happened, nor for

what I was suffering. Mr. Spencer saw this, and said,—

“Let her alone, mother. Florence will tell you all presently; but now she will be better left to herself and quiet.”

“Nonsense, my dear! That’s quite a man’s idea of trouble: it might do all very well for you, but women don’t like it; it does them good to have somebody to tell their troubles to. Now, Flory, darling, tell me what has vexed you. Is it that letter? Well, I thought so. Is it bad news from your mother or sister? are they ill? Do speak, Flory! I can’t bear to see you so miserable. It must be something very bad to make you look so wretched. Is it anything I can help you in—anything that I can do?”

“No, no! oh, no!” I cried; “no one can help me. I am alone in the world.”

“Oh, Flory!” exclaimed the old lady, in a tone of sorrowful reproach, “that must be indeed a sad letter to make you speak so.”

Mr. Spencer walked to the opposite side of the room; while I, ashamed of my seeming ingratitude, replied,—

“Forgive me, dear Mrs. Spencer, for I am very unhappy. Read that letter, and see if I have not cause to say that I am alone.”

“Well, dear child!” said she, when she had read the letter, and looking up through her spec-

tacles with a smile, half puzzled, half pleased. "And is this all you have been fretting about? The idea of this giddy young lassie and your mother spending a gay winter in Brighton, while you are moping with us? I did not think, Flory, that you were so fond of parties and merrymakings; but since you are, why I'll see what 'stupid Abberly' can do to amuse you."

"No, no! you cannot think so! It is not that; but they cast me off—despise me. Oh, mother! mother!" and leaning my head upon the pitying old lady's shoulder, I wept bitterly.

"Oh! Flory, I wish I were—with all my heart darling, I wish I were!" she replied, weeping for sympathy, and misunderstanding my ejaculation. "You've a strange hard-hearted family altogether, I think. But never mind; try and forget them, and make yourself happy with us. I'll be your mother now, Flory; but perhaps after a while the relationship may grow more distant, and I may only be an aunt: eh, Frank?"

For several days following this, I was very ill; nor, with my mind in the harassed state in which it appeared likely to remain, did it seem very probable that I should speedily rally. Painfully as I have often been placed since, I do not think I ever occupied a more embarrassing position than I did then."

My mother's home, being only under the roof of a friend, was none to me. I had no right to it; nor could I, in any event, dare to rely upon its shelter for an hour. I had so little money that I could not procure a home for myself; and, even if I could, it was a grave question whether I ought, and where I could go.

I could not take a situation as governess, even were I fortunate enough to obtain the opportunity; for I could not tell how soon the hour might come, as come it surely would, when I should be essential to my mother. No: I had no refuge, no choice, but to remain in the house of a man whose hand I had refused, and from whose roof every feeling of dignity and delicacy called upon me to retire at once.

People talk well and cleverly about the impossibility of things being really right, when appearances are so plainly wrong; but I learned a lesson that winter at Abberly which I have never forgotten, and upon which I have acted ever since: never, under any circumstances, to trust to, or judge from appearances; for many a bitter wrong is often done to an innocent person, for the sole reason that he, or she, being but human, cannot control them.

“ For let appearances be what they will,
You never so can shape them, that evil men
Will not their own construction put upon them.”

Much of this specious injustice was soon done me at Abberly. Everybody knew my circumstances : everybody knew, as old Mrs. Jenks, the retired grocer's wife, said, "that the girl hadn't one shilling to lay a' top of another"; and everybody knew that Frank Spencer, in succeeding to his uncle's property and practice, had inherited at least three thousand a year, besides his paternal fortune and that very handsome one which his aunt would leave him.

Everybody knew, therefore, that the young lawyer was, in common parlance, "a good match"; and, judging from appearances, they all decided that I was an artful, designing girl, ingratiating myself with the aunt for the sake of her nephew ; and, in their eloquent language, "making a dead set at him."

Nothing, meanwhile, could exceed the delicacy of Mr. Spencer's conduct. There was nothing in his manner to betray to those around us, that his feeling to me was any other, or stronger, than that of a host to his guest ; while to myself he never insinuated, by word or inuendo, that he remembered and remained stedfast to his self-imposed pledge of constancy.

Still, though he spoke and acted as usual, it was evident that he was ill at ease ; and people now began, not without reason, to comment upon his altered appearance. Whenever remarks of

this kind reached his ears, as they often did, he invariably laughed them off, attributing his ill looks to over-work in his profession; but although he strove thus to divert the gossip of his neighbours, it was impossible so to deceive his mother and myself: *we* knew that office anxieties had nothing to do with the change, and, after a time, Mrs. Spencer suspected the truth.

No sooner had she done so than she interrogated me closely; and from that day all my peace at Abberly was gone. Devoted to her adopted son, conscious of his worth, and fully alive to his many estimable qualities, she felt nothing but indignation against me for refusing his hand. In her eyes he was a fitting match for the best and greatest woman in the land; and in proportion as she loved and appreciated him, she was wrathful against me for causing him pain.

I do not think she intended to make me so miserable as she did; although I am sure that she rejoiced in seeing my discomfort, looking upon it as some sort of punishment for my rejection of her favourite. But, whether she knew it or not, she certainly succeeded in making my life a burthen to me.

Morning, noon, and night, the moment we were alone, her open or implied reproaches began: not with harsh, or bitter, or violent words—in such, she was too gentle and lady-like to indulge—but

those hardest things of all to bear, the reproaches of grieved and disappointed affection. Every change in her son's countenance, every flush upon his face, every weariness in his manner, were treasured up and commented upon; and, with a prophecy that he would surely die, she invariably ended in a flood of tears, and by asking me how I could be so cruel and insensible?

In this way matters went on for many weeks, until I became so nervous and dejected, that I am sure had Mr. Spencer at that time again asked me to become his wife, I should have accepted him, merely from the hope to escape persecution.

But the following incident, occurring during the spring, assisted to bring affairs to a different crisis.

We were all sitting one day after luncheon by an open window, enjoying the freshness of the air after a light shower of rain, when Dr. Seaforth called. His visit was to Mr. Spencer, who was suffering from a lingering cold, which had brought in its train an equally tedious cough; and certainly we all richly deserved the physician's reproof, for encouraging his patient in choosing a seat where he could inhale nothing but chilling vapours from the earth, nor any air except such as reached him in draughts.

"I really should not have expected this impru-

dence from you, Mrs. Spencer," said the Doctor, in concluding his harangue. "I thought you were more discreet than to allow a man with a cough like that, to do such an insane thing; it's enough to establish him upon the high road to consumption."

A long conversation ensued, and the invalid (who happened to be in very low spirits, and not inclined to laugh, as usual, at physicians' prophecies and advice) entered into a discussion upon the various kinds and symptoms of consumption, and finally left the room with his friend for a private conference.

No sooner had they retired, than the tears, which had been trembling in Mrs. Spencer's eyes during the whole time of Dr. Seaforth's visit, fell unrestrainedly, and she exclaimed pathetically,—

"I wonder how you can bear it, Florence: that I do!"

I made no reply; for my conscience upbraided me loudly: not so much for my inability to return her son's attachment, as for my selfishness in remaining an inmate of his house; receiving from him nothing but kindness, and returning nothing but pain.

I hated myself: and the more I thought, the more angry I became. For to what did I, or could I object, in my suitor? Morally and men-

tally, in fortune, birth, manner, and appearance, he was unexceptionable; and his constancy to me ought to have been sufficient to win for him the love of any disengaged heart. But so perverse is the will, that I do believe in that very thing lay the great secret of my indifference. Had he been less patient, less kind, and less forbearing—more like my cousin Philip in his fiery temper and scornful bearing; in fact, had he thought less of me and more of himself, his suit would have prospered better. And the consciousness of this—which, do as I would, forced itself upon me,—made me appear unreasonable and contemptible in my own eyes, and kept me silent.

For several minutes Mrs. Spencer continued to weep and talk, without seeming to expect or desire a reply; but at last she said, with a more sorrowful burst of emotion than before,—

“You will be sorry for this some day, Florence. Such things always come home to people: and it’s very right they should. When I think how I have loved you,—as well as if you had been my own child,—I can hardly believe that it is you who are bringing all this misery upon me. But it’s always the way; the more you care for other people, the less they care for you. I’ve known it all my life; and yet, like a simpleton, expected comfort and love from you!”

“And I do love you, dear Mrs. Spencer! Your

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own daughter could not love you more. But I cannot extend that love at pleasure. Love, like life, cannot be given at will."

"Nonsense, Florence! It is too late to talk so now. If you knew that it was not your will to return Frank's love, it ought at least not to have been your will to encourage it."

"I never did; indeed, I never did. Mr. Spencer would not do me the injustice to say that I did."

"No; for he will not suffer me to speak to him on the subject: and if he would, he would say nothing against you."

"I do believe it," I replied. "Mr. Spencer is too just and kind to make a false accusation even against an enemy."

"But why will you be his enemy, Florence? You, whom he loves so well. So good, and honourable, and true-hearted as he is, what can you object to? Where will you find his equal, much less his superior?"

"Nowhere."

"Then why will you be so stubborn, Flory? Why will you refuse to make him happy, and me too? You know how much I love you; how I shall rejoice to give up my place here to you, relying upon you for the care and tenderness of a daughter. Think how peaceful and happy you will make my old age, and how honoured and beloved you will

pass through life, both blessing and blessed! All that I have ——”

“Oh, cease, dear—dear Mrs. Spencer! You surely could not be satisfied with such a heart as mine. Nor dare I marry in the present condition of my mother’s affairs.”

“Ah! if that were all, they could be easily arranged. What would be yours at my death I will give you now; and that, with a share of your pin-money, will surely be enough for your mother and sister, however exacting they may be. Do not refuse me! Oh, Flory, do not refuse!” and seizing both my hands, she looked into my face with such an earnest entreaty that I was nearly overcome.

“What can I do or say?” I exclaimed. “I would gladly lay down my life to make yours happy; but how can I affect a love I do not feel, or deceive your son by giving him a wife whose affections are so unmoved, as to be utterly unworthy of him. Ah! dear Mrs. Spencer, spare us both.”

“From what, Flory?”

“From a life of disappointment and dissatisfaction. We are not fitted for each other; and nothing but sorrow could follow from the union of two such opposite natures.”

“That is a girl’s romance, Flory! For my sake, whom you profess to love, think better of

it. You see how wretchedly he is altered by your cruelty. Oh, do not rob me of him !”

“This is merciless,” I exclaimed, in great agitation. “You are urging me too far ; beyond what any one has a right to do. You are taking ungenerous advantage of my unhappy position to induce me to concede what my judgment refuses. It is you who are cruel.”

“Florence !” began the old lady ; but before she could utter another syllable, Mr. Spencer stood before us, with the flush of anger upon his brow, and his voice hoarse with indignation, saying,—

“Florence is right, mother ! and love for me must have strangely warped your usual keen sense of delicacy and honour, when you could so far forget the duties of hospitality, and the dignity of a woman, as to urge an unwelcome suit—and that suit your son’s—upon your guest.”

Then addressing me, he said,—

“Florence, you will, I know, acquit me of any part or knowledge of the persecution you have suffered. Your own sense of honour will assure you that it would be impossible for any one, with the feelings of a gentleman, and the proper self-respect of a man, to condescend, even for the sake of gaining his dearest wishes, to such unworthy means. How my mother has gained the knowledge she has used so indiscreetly, I

cannot tell; how she can have suffered her affection for me so to have outrun her judgment, as to use it in the way I have just heard, I cannot imagine. *I* must forgive it, for the sake of the many years of unfailing kindness I have received at her hands; but *you*, Florence?"

"Can readily forgive the little I have to pardon, for the same reason. It ought to need something more than a few hasty words to obliterate the memory of such friendship as I have enjoyed during the last few sorrowful months—and which, alas! I am so soon to lose; for I must leave you to-morrow."

"Oh, no, Flory! don't say so: don't go," exclaimed Mrs. Spencer, eagerly, through her tears.

"I must; indeed, I must. I have no choice. I had a letter from Helen this morning, written in the deepest distress. Mrs. Malin has died suddenly, and her son, with whom she was through life upon very painful terms, has, in taking possession of her effects and property, insulted my mother and Helen in the most unwarrantable manner. They will be in town to-morrow, and I must be there to meet them. My mother relies upon me. I did not mention this before, because, until I had written to Helen, and promised to be in London at the time she names, I knew that you would kindly urge my stay here; and

it is not wise, you know, to put oneself in the way of temptation."

"They must come here; must they not, Frank," cried Mrs. Spencer. "You must not go, Flory; we cannot spare you. I shall be miserable when you are gone. They must come here."

"It is impossible. The time for action, for which I have so long been waiting, is come at last; and I ought to be thankful that the trial has been delayed so long, not murmur that it has arrived now."

"But what shall I do, Flory, when you are gone? Who is to take your place to me? Who can ever be to me what you are? Whom shall I ever love half so well?" sobbed the old lady. "And I know that you will not be happy either," she added. "It is not for love that they send for you, but for what you can do to guide and help them; and you know that well."

"Perhaps; but how does that alter my duty?"

"It may not alter the duty; but it certainly does alter the way in which it may be performed," said Mr. Spencer.

"How?"

"In this way. If your mother and sister send for you out of pure love, and because, in their sorrow they pine for your affection and sympathy, then you ought to go; because nothing but your

presence can supply their want. But if they, having scorned your society while they had no need of it, now claim it because you are brave and self-sacrificing, and they know your energy will find out some way for their support, then your duty may assume another shape, and if you can give them the aid they require, without giving what they do not value,—except as the agent of relief,—you certainly may and ought to do so.”

“I do not understand you.”

“No, Flory?” exclaimed Mrs. Spencer, “I think it is very plain. But now let me speak, and try if I can make you understand in my way. You and I have often agreed that money is only valuable for the comforts it procures, and the help it enables us to give to others: and we have said, over and over again, that it never ought to be weighed against happiness, and that if either of us had the means to assist the other at her need, it would be no sacrifice, because we should receive the recompense we preferred. Well, what we have agreed to so often, I want to put in practice: not exactly in the way I should like best, but in the only way I think your pride will suffer you to accept my aid: for, wisely as you talk, Flory, I am afraid that your pride, and not your wisdom, will be your counsellor now. Your society is dearer to me than anything on earth except my

son, and to secure that, I wish to make an exchange with you—to drive a hard bargain, Flory,—giving you what to me is valueless, in exchange for what is priceless—your time for my gold. Whatever by any calculation you can earn for your family in London, I will pay you to stay with me. My income is larger than I ever spend; and, since you are too proud to share it as a free-will gift, you shall have the satisfaction of earning it: thus you will do your duty to your mother, by giving her what she requires, and make me happy too.”

I hesitated; not as to what I should do, but how to refuse this indiscreet, but most generous offer in the least offensive terms; for in her zeal to serve me, I saw that Mrs. Spencer had quite forgotten the position in which I stood with her son.

Happily, therefore, for me, just as I was about to reply, and just as the eagerness of Mrs. Spencer's manner yielded to a painful confusion, which showed that the impossibility of the arrangement she had proposed, suddenly occurred to her, the door was thrown open, and visitors, self-invited to spend the day, were ushered in.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next day, after a most distressing scene, I left Abberly.

The coach was unoccupied except by myself, and, until it stopped to change horses at the end of the first stage, nothing occurred to divert my thoughts from dwelling upon the parting tears and grief of the good old lady I had left. But when we reached the roadside inn by the eighth mile-stone, beside which stood the four horses with which we were to go on, the tones of a well-known voice caused me to start forward on my seat. They were Mr. Spencer's, answering the passing salutation of a gentleman. In an instant after, he came to the coach-door, saying,—

“We shall have a charming day. The sky is without a cloud.”

“We? why, where are you going?”

“To London: how astonished you look! Did you think, Florence, that I should suffer you to go alone?”

The deep love of his heart betrayed itself in the very tones of his voice ; but, as if aware of it, he rallied immediately, and added,—

“My mother would scarcely trust a basket of china on one of these awful four-horse vehicles without an escort, how then do you think she would trust a timid young lady like you? Besides, impossible as it may seem to you that any one can have business in London except yourself, I have a great deal there just now. Six common-law actions and two Chancery suits; three bad debts that I want my agent to make me an allowance for; five cases for counsel to advise upon, besides a host of other legal matters. I want to have an interview with the famous Quack Doctor respecting this cough of mine; then I want to hear those wonderful bullfinches that Dr. Seaforth told us about yesterday; next, I want to choose my mother a new cap, and last, not least, I want to consult my tailor. But, hark ! there’s Waterhouse calling. Coming ! All right ! Good-bye, for the next stage.”

And as he divided these last sentences between me and the coachman, the latter called out impatiently, “Now then, sir !” to which hint his passenger responded by catching the rail of the box seat, and with one step and spring, establishing himself by his side.

The day was far advanced when we arrived in

London, and as I was anxious to conclude my journey as quickly as possible, Mr. Spencer ordered a coach, and insisted upon accompanying me to my mother's lodgings.

When we reached them, we found that my mother and Helen (who had, contrary to their first intention, come up from Brighton the day before) were gone out.

"They expected you, Miss, about two o'clock," said the servant, "and as you didn't come, the lady said she couldn't wait dinner, but would have it as soon as it was ready, and then go for a walk or call on some lady in one of the squares."

"Did my mother say when she should return? Did she leave no message for me?"

"No, Miss, she only said she mightn't be back to tea."

"Then I vote that you order it at once, and invite me to be a partaker," said Mr. Spencer gaily, endeavouring to chase away the gloom which he saw steal over me at this singular reception. "Remember we have had no dinner, and not a superabundant luncheon, therefore if you are not the very genius of inhospitality herself, you can do no less than offer me a share of the good things you would otherwise monopolize. Mary, Miss Sackville will take tea immediately."

During the meal scarcely a word was spoken ;

for my heart was full of mortification and apprehension, and the melancholy contrast everything about me presented to the elegance of Ingerdyne and the old-fashioned comfort of Abberly, struck me with dismay.

Everything was tidy—oh, so tidy! as if nothing was ever to be removed from its place. The tables seemed to have grown up slowly from the floor with the house itself, so old and thin and worn they looked. The carpet had once been ornamented with some sort of pattern, for here and there, under the edge of the well-darned hearth-rug and beneath the ends of the curtains, there were still faint traces of red and yellow hieroglyphics; but those days were long past, and nothing now remained but a well-brushed, threadbare, napless covering, affording neither warmth nor beauty, and in comparison to the poverty-stricken look of which, clean white boards would have been far preferable.

Along the wall, relieved at intervals by the door the fireplace and the window, stood six chairs; and so exactly were the distances of each measured from the others, that one's *first* impression upon seeing them always was, that they were indigenous to the soil, and the next, an involuntary sensation of surprise that they moved upon being pushed. Over the chimney-piece was a long,

narrow slip of looking-glass, divided into three parts by slips of black wood intended to represent ebony, and held together by a worn and rickety gilt frame. The glass leaned forward at such an angle with the wall, that it appeared to be intended solely for the benefit of the fender and fire-irons, ancient and worn like itself, whose deplorable meagreness it seemed cruel to reflect.

The curtains, made of a chintz that might have hung round a bed of some old country house in Queen Elizabeth's time, and from which the sun and the wash-tub had extracted all brightness of colour, hung down in melancholy scantiness by the windows, which were smeared as if with recent attempts at cleaning ; and the whole house, with its keen, hungry-looking mistress and pert little servant, matched the "drawing-room" well. However, the place had certainly this merit—everything was in keeping.

It may seem very absurd to those who have never reflected how much the human mind is influenced by outward circumstances, to hear me say how all these discomforts weighed upon my spirits. But there are certain proprieties which, to people accustomed to them, become not so much elegances, as necessities of life ; and the loss of which affects the spirits, and depresses the energies, far more than absolute suffering. How much truth is there in these lines of Miss Landon :—

Life's smallest miseries are perhaps its worst.
Great sufferings have great strength.—There is a pride
In the bold energy that braves the worst,
And bears, proud in the bearing; but the heart
Consumes with those small sorrows, and small shames,
Which crave, yet cannot ask for sympathy.
We blush that they exist; and yet how keen
The pang that they inflict!

Throughout that phase of my life which here commenced, I found it far easier to bear a scant supply of what men call the needs of life, than the absence of those little elegances which long habit had made necessary. I never felt how poor we were until that evening in M—— Street; and then, for the first time, I realized the change.

Had I arrived to a foodless table, and before me had been opened at once a course of labour and activity, I could have borne it cheerfully; addressing myself to work with energy. But the multitude of petty miserable shifts and meanesses thrust upon me on all sides, dejected and subdued me.

Mr. Spencer and I had finished our meal when my mother and sister returned.

“Ah, Florence!” was my mother's first salutation, “how late you came! When you were not here at two o'clock, I ceased to expect you until to-morrow. How could you think of travelling so far in the afternoon?”

“Oh, Flory! isn't this a horrid place?” cried

Helen, almost in tears. "Do, pray, do something to get us out of it."

"I will do all I can, Helen; little though, I'm afraid, it will be. But, mother, you are not aware that you have a visitor, Mr. Spencer, who has kindly escorted me from Abberly, and to whom I have been doing the honours in your absence."

"Indeed! I really must apologize. I was certainly not aware of your presence, Mr. Spencer. You left your mother well, I hope. She is not with you, of course: there is nothing during the recess to bring people to town; although I should have been delighted had she thought otherwise, and afforded me an opportunity of thanking her for her kindness to my daughter."

"My mother was only too happy in being allowed to retain Miss Sackville so long: although I fear we cannot flatter ourselves that the regret she feels at parting with her is mutual. Abberly is a sad dull place, Miss Helen, is it not?"

"Oh, dreadful!" answered Helen, with a little shudder. "I would not live there for the world; and the people are such oddities. I used to think the Abberly people who came now and then to Ashton, would have been treasures to a museum."

And, as if she had forgotten that she was then addressing one of their quaint tribe, she tossed her fair ringlets and laughed gaily, as of old.

"Ah, Miss Helen!" said Mr. Spencer. "I see

you will not be on my side: the petition my mother prefers to Mrs. Sackville, by me, will have no supporter in you."

"Petition! what is it? I am in a very liberal mood to-night, since Florence has come to take us away from this den of gloom and horrors. I will advocate anything, except her going away without mamma and me."

"My petition is a bold one, and has reference to you all," replied Mr. Spencer.

"To me?" said my mother, with an air of indifference. "I am sure I shall be most happy to gratify Mrs. Spencer in any way I can."

"There! now you have mamma's promise, I will give you mine; so tell me what your petition is?"

"No less than to bring you, Mrs. Sackville and your sister, to enliven my mother's solitude during the summer, by going down to the 'museum' storehouse. I wish to spend a few months in Scotland this year; my mother naturally shrinks from remaining at Abberly so long alone; and, though she cannot hope to make it as pleasant to you as Brighton, still she ventures to trust that it will not be altogether disagreeable."

"Oh, do let us go, mamma!" cried Helen, eagerly: "at least you and me. Flory, I dare say, will wish to stay here to see about the settling, and all that; but we can do no good, and I should so like to go."

"You forget, my darling, that it is impossible," said my mother. "I must remain in town until something is arranged. Pray, present my compliments and thanks to your mother, Mr. Spencer, and tell her how much gratification it would give me, under other circumstances, to accept her invitation; but that at present it is impossible."

"Let me hope that you will alter your determination," urged Mr. Spencer.

"Thank you, you are very good; but I see no prospect of it. Affairs are at present in so perplexed and hopeless a state, that it is absolutely necessary some exertion should be made at once."

"Can I be of any service?" asked Mr. Spencer. "I am, you know, a lawyer; and, as you are aware, have some knowledge of your affairs already. Therefore, if I can be useful, pray make no scruple in employing me."

"Do mamma! Do let Mr. Spencer and Flory manage these tiresome affairs," cried Helen. "Flory loves business, and I detest it."

"Well, my love, we will talk about it tomorrow; and if I think that Florence can arrange matters without us, I shall be very glad to please you, and accept Mrs. Spencer's kind invitation. Your mother will find Helen a much more lively companion than Florence, I think, Mr Spencer."

He bowed.

"But do not set your heart upon a visit to

Abberly, dearest," she continued, addressing Helen; "for I very much fear that we shall find it impossible to accomplish it. I will do all I can, and so of course will Florence—for I confess that I cannot bear the thought of your being harassed with the details of business—but still I have very little hope. Helen is not constituted to bear the world's rough treatment; she is too sensitive," said my mother, turning to her guest.

"Oh, I could never endure what Flory does!" exclaimed Helen.

"Few women could," said Mr. Spencer, drily.

"You are right, Mr. Spencer," replied my mother; "but Florence was always unlike every other girl. From a child she cultivated a spirit of independence of control, which enables her to do now what a different or more tender nature, like her sister's, would shrink from. She was never intended for a quiet life; she will combat the storm like a heroine."

Mr. Spencer's eye sought mine as my mother said this; and, unable to bear its expression, I turned away and gazed vacantly at the closed windows.

"Have you seen Captain Sackville, since you arrived in town?" asked he, after a pause.

"No. I hear that he is in Wales; but at present I have neither seen nor heard from him."

"Have you written, may I ask?"

"Yes, through his agents; but I have had no reply."

"You will not think me impertinent, I trust, if I venture to inquire what your projects are? Under existing circumstances, it seems imperative that some communication should be opened at once with Captain Sackville."

"Yes, I think so: although how it is to be effected, I cannot tell."

"Pending its accomplishment, have you formed any plans, or fixed upon any course?"

"No. But I am a wretched woman of business; I must leave all such things to Florence: she has innumerable resources."

"Oh, yes! Flory loves business; she is so clever and active. It would have killed me to have been at dear Ingerdyne among all those horrible men," said Helen, with her bewitching smile; "but Flory did not mind it. I wish I was as brave."

She evidently expected a compliment in reply to this, but instead, there came upon her listener's lip a slight curl, which she did not like: so she continued,—

"I am so tired, and so idle. Therefore, as I can't help you in your discussion, I may as well wish you all good-night. Good-night, Mr. Spencer: I hope, since you are such a *chevalier aux dames*, we shall see you in the morning to

inquire how Flory has rested; so I shall only say good-night to you. Come up stairs soon, Flor.; I have such a love of an album to show you."

After Helen's departure, a long conversation ensued between my mother and Mr. Spencer, in which I took no part. Throughout the whole of it, she spoke, and seemed to think, of me as of a puppet, having no choice, no will, but hers; nor any power of acting, apart from her permission. No Turkish slave was ever more completely looked upon as her master's property, than I was treated by my mother as hers. But I did not resent it by word or look: I was too proud, and too deeply hurt for such commonplaces. A sort of sullen indifference to my fate, a recklessness as to what I was bid to do, had come over me; and I felt as if life or death, joy or sorrow, labour or ease, were alike to me.

Presently the conversation turned upon a letter which Mr. Spencer requested to see, and my mother left the room to search for it. I raised my head languidly as the door closed after her, but rested it immediately upon my hand again; and not a word was spoken.

This lasted about a quarter of an hour, when the servant entered to say that Mrs. Sackville could not find the letter, and that if Mr. Spencer would excuse her while she looked through

another desk, or allow her to defer it until the next morning, she would then show it to him.

“Give my compliments to Mrs. Sackville, and request her not to trouble herself any further to-night,” said Mr. Spencer: “to-morrow will do as well.”

The moment the girl was gone, Mr. Spencer started from his seat and came impetuously towards me, taking the hand which lay passive upon my knee,—

“Florence!” he exclaimed, “dearest, dearest Florence, look up! Do not seem so heart-broken and desolate, or I shall go mad: if, indeed, I am not so already. I cannot endure to see you so undervalued and sacrificed as you are here; nor could you live long to bear it. Come back, then, with me to Abberly: leave it with us to reconcile your family to your absence, and return to my mother, who will welcome you with open arms. Come back, and find in our affection a compensation for that which is denied to you here; and gladden my mother’s declining years with your love and tenderness. For me, do with me as you will. I love you so well that I can give up all hope of being more or nearer to you than a friend, if thus I can best secure your happiness: *that* is dearer to me than my own, and there is not upon earth a sacrifice I should not esteem it a privilege to make, so that by it you were benefited. Only

let me see you happy, and I shall be content. Therefore discard all scruples, dearest, and return with me: trust me, you shall never regret it."

"I am sure of it," I answered earnestly; "but it is impossible."

"Not, surely, if I obtain your mother's consent."

"Yes, even then. I have not my own."

"Florence!"

"Are you surprised? After what I said to you long since, when these difficulties first commenced, how did you expect me to act when the time for action came? Did you think the first unloving words would frighten me from my duty, and that to escape even continual misconception I should forsake those whom I am bound to assist?"

"No! but what can you do? Only show me that, and I will try to be satisfied. With all your willingness to sacrifice yourself for those who will neither appreciate, nor give you credit for it, what can you do? This is a hard world to wrest a living from."

"Yes; but I have great faith in myself, in the power of will, and the energy of a firm purpose."

He sighed heavily, saying,—

"May you find them sufficient."

"I do not fear. My duty lies clear before me; and, be the result of the struggle what it may, I must and will make it."

As I spoke these brave words, which grievously belied the sinking of my heart, my tears fell unheeded, almost unconsciously, and he continued:—

"Florence! your heart misgives you."

"No, no; I am tired, that is all: I am not frightened.

"You well might be. It is no light thing that you have undertaken to do."

"Dreading it will not make it easier; it is not wise to encourage fears until they make one helpless."

"Not generally; although now it would be. Anything would be wise to do now, which would arouse you to a sense of the needless misery into which you are rushing. Oh, Florence! are you right to persist in the course you seem bent upon? Is nothing due to others—to those who love you well, and who would sacrifice their own happiness to insure yours? Do their wishes or fears for you deserve no consideration? Or are you resolute to set everything at nought—your own welfare, your friends' peace, and all that has hitherto been valuable to you? Oh, that I could show you what real poverty and struggles are!"

"It would avail nothing. I know they are terrible."

"Then how hateful both I and Abberly must be to you, when, in preference to either, you choose an alternative that you acknowledge to be terrible," said Mr. Spencer, bitterly.


"You are unkind and unjust to say so; but you do not mean it."

"I do! why else do you scorn all help and home from us?"

"I do not scorn either; I only repeat what I said once before, that while my family require my labour and I live to render it, I will work for them. I will never desert them at their need; nor will I ever, to spare myself, burthen another."

"Be it so!" he answered sorrowfully. "Your indomitable pride, Florence, over-masters both your strong sense and your natural kindliness of heart; and you involve others in sorrow from which, under different circumstances, you would be the first to shield them. But I will say no more. I would not seem to force myself, or my mother's home, upon your acceptance. Both are yours to accept or reject; and having said this, I can say no more. While I live, I will serve you whenever you will let me; and while she lives, my mother's house will always have open doors for you."

The very same words Mr. Lyle had written ! I trembled as I heard them. Twice had I been promised love and shelter, and I had refused to accept them. Was I right ? Or was my firmness, indeed, as Mr. Spencer said, only obstinacy and pride ? The future would show.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Mr. Spencer took leave, and, by my mother's desire, I wrote to my father immediately after; sending the letter through his agents.

A fortnight passed waiting for the reply; but none came, and I wrote again. To this last letter after another fortnight's delay, the following brief note was vouchsafed:—

“DEAR FLORENCE,

“I have nothing now but my pay, and as that is not sufficient to cover my own expenses, it is impossible that I should be able to do anything for you. I am very sorry for it, because I should like to make you all comfortable; however, it is a great satisfaction to know that with the education you and Helen have received, you will both be able to provide for yourselves.

“Whenever I can send you any money I will; but do not rely upon it, as unforeseen circum-

stances may often arise to prevent my doing as I wish. Be assured that I shall never forget you, nor neglect any opportunity of serving your interests; and with love to you all, believe me truly yours,

“G. SACKVILLE.”

This epistle had neither address nor date; and, as the only post-mark it bore was a London one, it was alike impossible to discover the writer or reply to his letter. My mother's indignation upon reading it was extreme; while poor Helen wept and grieved so violently as to make herself really ill for several days.

During all this time my mother was wretched indeed: she never sorrowed for herself, her lost comforts, or changed position, nor yet for me; but for Helen she grieved unceasingly. The very idea of Helen being compelled to exertion and obliged to do daily work for daily bread, was terrible to her. Many times I feared lest her extreme distress should affect her health materially; seeing that, as it was, it confined her to her room, and often to her bed. Our funds, too, were nearly exhausted, and, as they diminished, her spirits sank lower and lower.

Three months after our arrival in London, our united purses scarcely furnished twenty pounds, and upon that sum we had to subsist for an indefinite time.

All sorts of vague and chimerical projects were suggested by Helen, not one of which was feasible ; and, as their absurdity and impracticability were successively pointed out to her, she became indignant and wilful, declaring that,—

“ Florence can’t bear anything which is not proposed by herself: she is so jealous.”

And truly it seemed as if we were bent upon contradicting each other ; for to nothing that I proposed would Helen agree. She would not hear of becoming a governess, or of giving lessons in music or dancing, in both of which accomplishments she excelled ; nor of trying with me to open a school. If she might not do as she wished, she would do nothing.

In these altercations many valuable days passed, days precious for the work that might have been done in them ; and at their end we were no nearer to a conclusion, than we had been at their commencement.

It was perfectly absurd for me to seek occupation as a governess, in the expectation of receiving sufficient remuneration to support Helen and my mother ; and, although I soon obtained the promise of four pupils to learn drawing, I knew that from these I should not earn enough to afford us a bare subsistence.

We were speedily obliged to reduce our frugal expenses, by seeking cheaper lodgings ; and we

removed from the meagre-looking rooms in Brompton, to others more humble still in the Westminster-road.

Here an incident occurred, the day after our arrival, which afforded me great pleasure.

My mother and sister were out, and I was sitting sorrowfully in our scantily furnished bedroom, when the servant of the house entered, bringing a pair of shoes ; it was her first appearance before me, and, making a low curtsy, she stopped at the door, saying, in the broadest Irish,—

“ Will you plase to have yer pumps in here, Miss ? ”

I answered in the affirmative, and then directed her to perform some tidy work about the room, which was in a most neglected state. In doing this, she upset a basin of water on the toilette-table, and scattered its ornaments far and wide. Her dismay was excessive : what kind of punishments she was accustomed to for such misdemeanours I could not tell, but her gratitude to me for helping to put matters to rights, and promising not to ring for “ the mistress,” was almost ludicrous.

“ An’ sure, Miss, dear, you’ve the ginerous heart : an’ plase God ! I’ll not forget the good turn you’ve done me this day. I only came to this place a month a-gone, an’ I’d have lost my

carracthur intirely if you'd tould the misthress of me accidint."

"Have you been long from Ireland?" I asked.

"No, Miss, only sin' my aunt, as I lived wid, died with the faver. An' please God, I'll soon be back agin among our people. Bad luck to me that iver I left them!"

While she was speaking, she seized upon my mother's dressing-case, and in the vehemence of her regret, rubbed it so heartily, that fearful of another accident, I exclaimed,—

"Take care, my good girl; that dressing-case belongs to Mrs. Sackville, and ——"

"Sackville!" cried the girl, staring at me with open eyes and mouth: "did yer honor say Sackville?"

"Yes, that is my mother's name: did not you know it?"

"An' would ye be from Ireland?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, from Galway."

"An' the mather! Would he be a souldier?"

"Yes."

"The saints be praised this day! An' it's little I expected sich joy in this house—the blessing o' God be about it now an' iver! Oh, Miss Flory, dear! sure you're my aunt's Miss Flory."

"My name is Florence, certainly. But who are you? and who is your aunt?"

"Sure an' I'm Biddy Sullivan; an' me aunt was yer own nurse, Cicely O'Donovan."

"Cicely! Are you Cicely's niece? Oh! can it be true?" I cried, joyfully.

"'Deed, Miss, sorra word of a lie is there in it, at all, at all. An' wasn't it in hopes to meet wid the family that I came over?"

"And where is Cicely?"

"She's dead. The heavens be her bed this day! She died wid the faver last Christmas."

"Dear old Cicely!" I exclaimed, my eyes filling with tears at the memory of all her love and tenderness. "I wonder if she remembered me."

"Is it remimbered yourself you mane, Miss? Bekase if you do, you may be sure she nivir forgot you while the life was in her poor worn-out body."

"Had she been ill long then? How was it that she never sent to us?"

A long explanation followed this inquiry; from which I learned that, during the whole of her tedious and painful illness, the thoughts and anxieties of my poor old nurse had centred upon me; and that she had laid her dying commands upon her niece Biddy to come, after her death, to England and offer her services to me and the "captin."

This injunction Biddy performed, to the best of her power. She came to England, and pro-

gressed as far as London; but there her finances failed, and she was obliged to "take service," as she said, "in a contimptible bit of a lodgin'-house where the ghost of a raal lady nivir came from year's ind to year's ind." Her wages were too small to allow her to save the most trifling sum, and she was beginning to relinquish all hope of being able to fulfil her aunt's command, when she so unexpectedly discovered me.

It would be difficult to say which of us was most gratified by the meeting. Biddy's delight was perhaps the loudest, but mine was assuredly as great; and it is certainly not too much to acknowledge that I looked upon the introduction as one which promised to afford me real comfort and assistance.

Nor was I disappointed. Her shrewd Irish wit, quick common sense, and affectionate fidelity, were invaluable to me in many ways; and when our purse was exhausted, and it became needful to replenish it by the disposal of various articles of jewellery, Biddy transacted the business with strict secrecy and care.

Among the various projects for employing myself profitably which now incessantly occupied my thoughts, it occurred to me one day that Mr. Edward Bellair had said, after reading a slight sketch which I had written in an album at Mowbray, that the author had considerable talent in

composition, which, if cultivated would be valuable. As "drowning men catch at straws," I found myself dwelling upon Mr. Bellair's chance words, until I determined to try my fate with some magazine.

Without saying a word to any one, I wrote a short and doleful story, miserable enough to give its readers a violent fit of blue devils, and despatched it by Biddy to the weekly journal I had fixed upon.

The paper was published on a Saturday, and a board upon which the contents of each week were advertised, was always hung outside the office-door. Past this door I walked three successive Saturdays. My heart never appeared to beat from the instant I entered the street in which the periodical was published, until I stood before the board; then it leaped so furiously that it seemed to threaten suffocation, and it was some seconds before my eyes were clear enough to read the announcement.

Three successive Saturdays, as I have said, I went into that street with a palpitating heart, and left it with a heavy and desponding one; but upon the fourth, I saw in large letters, the first glimpse of which took my breath away with delight,—

"BRIAN BOROHIME, AN IRISH TALE."

My story was accepted; and henceforth I was an authoress.

Visions of constant employment, pecuniary freedom and literary reputation, floated before my eyes. I had no very distinct idea of how publishers paid, but I had a vague and misty imagination of large sums being given for small articles, and great homage being rendered to authors. Simple fictions both; but at that time most devoutly believed to be realities.

Upon the following Tuesday I sent Biddy with a note, and another paper to the editor. The first was answered by a cheque, for scarcely more than a quarter of what I had innocently expected; and the last by the editor's compliments, saying that he was already overstocked with articles of the same description, but would have pleasure in finding a place for "The Blarney Stone" in the course of a few weeks.

I was grievously disappointed; for I had suffered myself to hope and believe that in my pen I had found the means of supporting us all, and this discouragement was hard to bear.

Still I did not quite despair; nor give up trying. With a patient courage, at which I wonder now, it was so resolute, I sent six little sketches to as many different magazines. Of these one was accepted, and *paid for*: one accepted, and *not* paid for; two were returned; one lost in the publisher's office; and, with respect to the other, the editor did not vouchsafe any tidings at all.

This would not do; that was a self-evident fact. Writing was not my *forte*; or, if it were, no one seemed disposed to place any faith in it: and we could not live upon *hope*.

It so happened that the rooms below those we occupied, were tenanted by a lady who taught music; and she, hearing Helen's blithe voice carolling above, managed to establish a speaking acquaintance with her. Our fellow-lodger had a fine-toned piano, and at last she invited Helen into her sitting-room to try it.

I have said that Helen was famous for talking, and before many visits to Mrs. Chace and her piano, she had confided our whole history to her. The result of this was a conversation which caused Helen one morning to rush up-stairs into my bed-room, and exclaim,—

“Oh, Flory! Mrs. Chace has hit upon such a capital plan for us! She wants you to go upon the stage.”

“Me! The stage! Helen, you are certainly mad.”

“No, no! she has seen you several times, she says, and she thinks you would make an excellent actress.”

“Indeed! I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to her.”

“Now, Flory, don't be cross and dignified! Mrs. Chace says it is not at all difficult, and you

will get a great deal of money; and it will be so nice, travelling about all over the country."

"For those who like it, I daresay it might; but I do not: so pray, Helen, do not repeat any more of your friend's impertinences."

"But if you won't do this, what are we to do? How are we to live?"

"I don't know: but certainly not by my turning actress."

"Why not, Florence? Mrs. Chace says it is a very pleasant life."

"So it may be: and as you seem to like the plan so well, why do not you adopt it?"

"Me, Florence!" cried Helen, opening her large eyes to their utmost extent. "What do you think mamma would say?"

"I am sure I cannot tell: much the same I suppose as she would to my doing so."

"Oh, no! Besides, I have not the taste for it."

"Nor have I."

"But, Flory," persevered Helen, "how are we to live else? Mrs. Chace says that in time you might earn twenty or thirty pounds a week. That's better than writing, is it not?"

"Yes; to those who have to spend the money," I said, bitterly: "scarcely to those who have to earn it."

"Perhaps not: though what you can see to object to, I cannot conceive."

"Then why do you not do it yourself, Helen?" I asked, angrily. "Why? but because you shrink from the degradation. You know and feel that it would be hateful beyond all words to express, or money to compensate; and you shun it like a crime. Then how dare you urge such a life upon me? Am I less than you, or different from you, that I should do that which is too vile for you?"

"What strange ideas you have, Florence! You are the oddest girl I ever knew! I thought you always intended to do something for us all; and now you are as indignant at being told how you may obtain the most money, as if I had proposed something dreadful. You are quite incomprehensible."

"Does my refusing to become an actress make me so? Is it so very extraordinary that my feelings should rebel against a step which is too degrading to be even named as possible for you? Where is the difference between us, Helen, which makes you think to use me as a tool? Why do you, in my case, set at nought the dignity, delicacy, and reserve, of which I have at least as great a share as yourself? Why is that to be right for me, which is the contrary for you?"

"Because we have been different all our lives; and because something must be done for poor mamma. I did not think you were too proud to help her, Florence."

I did not trust myself to speak, but left the room quickly. It was well that my pride lent me sufficient self-control to do so, for in my undisciplined state of mind and want of humility, I cannot tell what rash things I might have said.

When I reached the sitting-room, where I hoped to find my mother, I started to see Mrs. Chace there, and alone.

My salutation would have rendered any tolerably sensitive person thoroughly uncomfortable; but it had no more effect upon this woman of the world, than if she and I had been nodding automats.

"I have done myself the pleasure of calling upon your mamma, Miss Sackville," she said, "to offer her tickets for the Haymarket to-night. Ellen Tree plays 'Ion'; and as your sister says she has not seen her, I think you will be gratified."

"You are very good," I said, haughtily; "but my mother never goes to the theatre."

"Oh! but she will relax for once, in favour of Ellen Tree, and so classical a piece as 'Ion,'" returned the lady, with a winning smile: "at any rate, I will leave the tickets, and shall hope to see you at the Haymarket to-night. Your sister has set her heart upon it, I know; and I am sure your mamma could refuse her nothing, so fascinating and bewitching as she is."

I made no reply, and the lady went on.

“And her voice, too; how very sweet and pure its tones are: but that seems to be a family inheritance. I have had the pleasure of hearing you sing frequently, and although your notes are not so true as your sister’s, they are infinitely richer and fuller. You have paid great attention to your voice?”

“Scarcely any.”

“Indeed! then you have a great treasure yet unopened, Miss Sackville: two or three years training under such a man as Welsh, or De Pinna, and you would do wonders. Your enunciation is so perfect, and your tones are so clear, that either in speaking or singing you might achieve anything.”

I was not gratified by this speech, as Mrs. Chace evidently expected that I should be; for the flattery was too gross; and she soon discerned that I was thoroughly impracticable. She therefore changed her ground, and after a little further conversation, said, in a sympathizing tone,—

“You must be exceedingly lonely here, after the gay life to which you have been accustomed. It is distressing beyond expression to see the prospects of a sweet young creature like your sister so mournfully blighted. Your mamma, too; how sadly she has altered, even since she came here. You appear to be her only stay: everything

seems deferred to you, and it must be delightful to a mind like yours to find how truly you are appreciated."

There was a vulgar *pushing* manner in this lady which exasperated me beyond measure. Yet I restrained the impulse which would have led me to say something desperately uncivil, and sat silent, and so far inoffensive.

My mother and Helen came in soon after, and, to my astonishment, the tickets were not only accepted, but the donor's offer of places in her conveyance to the theatre was accepted also. Mrs. Chace praised and flattered Helen until my mother's usual good taste deserted her, and she could see no fault in the woman who so truly valued her darling.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN obedience to my mother's wish, and for the second time in my life that I had been to a theatre, I went with them to the Haymarket. And certainly, if Mrs. Chace's object in urging my visit, was to reconcile me in some sort to her proposal, she succeeded.

The exquisite acting and beautiful language, the classical dresses and scenery of "Ion," delighted me. I was so perfectly absorbed by the stage, that I had neither eyes nor senses for the world around me. For the time, and whenever Ellen Tree was before me, all outward things were forgotten, and instead of a beautiful fiction, "Ion,"—his loves and resolves, his aspirations and deeds—was a most vivid reality.

Mrs. Chace saw it, and as we returned home she said to my mother,—

"Did you ever see so striking a likeness as that between Ellen Tree and Miss Sackville? I never could remember who it was that your daughter

resembled so strongly, but to-night it struck me at once."

"Do you think so? Florence's features are scarcely so marked as Miss Tree's."

"Perhaps not; still the *tout ensemble* is similar. Miss Sackville might well pass for Ellen Tree's younger and fairer sister, and were they both in the same profession, I think it would soon be hard to say which of the two was the greatest favourite with the public. Miss Sackville's voice is far superior to Ellen's, so is her figure and style, and she only requires the hard work and good training Ellen has had, to compete with her successfully upon her own ground."

How poverty and fear for Helen's fate had changed my mother! A year before, such a speech as this would have been considered an insult, and the very *idea* of a granddaughter of her father becoming an actress, looked upon as a sin; but now all was changed, and money, or that which would bring it, was the only thing thought of.

Three days after this visit to the theatre, during which interval my mother was greatly worked upon by Mrs Chace's representation, she told me that our funds were nearly exhausted.

"And where the next money is to be procured," she said, "I have no idea, nor what is to become of us."

"I will sell those pearls which Mr. Lyle gave me, and while the money they bring lasts, Helen and I must try to do something; only keep up your spirits, mother, and we shall do well yet."

"How, Florence? I confess I do not see."

"If you could only prevail upon Helen to give music lessons, I would strive to obtain a situation as governess; and only retaining as much of my salary as was absolutely necessary for my dress, the rest would come to you and Helen; so between us both we might manage to make you comfortable."

"Why, Florence," replied my mother, rather sarcastically, "how much do you suppose you would receive as a governess?"

"Perhaps fifty pounds!"

"Rather say twenty. Governesses are the worst paid and least valued people in existence. No, Florence, if that is your only scheme, I see very little chance of our being comfortable: besides, I question very much if Helen's health could bear the fatigue of teaching."

"She has never been ill, I think, mother."

"She never complains," was the reply.

"I am not nearly so great a proficient in music as she is, therefore I fear I should get but few pupils; though perhaps I might succeed in obtaining two or three more for drawing."

"And the proceeds? Scarcely more than you would require for your own wardrobe."

"Oh! I must learn to be economical. But do you not think, mother, that Helen and I might keep a school?"

"When and how could you furnish a house?"

"Oh! if you and Helen would consent, I think we might manage that easily. Mrs. Spencer or Mr. Lyle would lend the money."

"A strange loan, borrowed and lent without hope of repayment," answered my mother, contemptuously.

"Well, let it be a gift, then: we are not too proud to receive help, mother," I said cheerfully, making a great effort to speak with proper temper and respect to the parent who, without proposing any better step than mine, negatived all my suggestions so positively. "I shall be most thankful for the help that would enable me to enter any respectable and promising way of life, by which I could assist you and Helen."

At this moment, Biddy entered with a note for my mother.

"Tickets for to-night for Drury Lane, from Mrs. Chace: she is very kind," said my mother, when she had read the billet.

"She is very officious, I think, mother; you used not to like such people."

"Nor should I choose her society now, but that

she amuses Helen, and the use of her piano is very valuable to her. We are not in circumstances to reject such advantages; although I think you have taken an unreasonable prejudice to Mrs. Chace: she is much more liberal; for, although she cannot but see how much you dislike her, she speaks of you in the handsomest terms, and would gladly serve you, if you would let her."

"She is very good," I said proudly; "but I am not yet fallen so low as to require, or endure her patronage; nor do you, mother, wish it, I am sure."

"My wishes appear to be of very little value in your estimation, Florence. Your unreasonable temper and pride have always been a great source of discomfort to me, as your poor grand-papa prophesied they would be; but you scarcely bear out his prediction otherwise. He imagined, that however unattractive your character might be in prosperity; yet that in adversity you would never fail me."

"And he was right, mother: I never will. Show me what your wishes are,—treat me as you do Helen, and I will obey you faithfully."

"I think not, Florence: you have never cared for, nor sought my love as she has done; and even if I could give it at will, it would have little or no effect."

"Oh, mother, mother!" I cried, heart-stung, while the scalding tears filled my eyes, "do not be so unjust to me. Helen never cared for your love more than I have, nor half so much. As a child I pined for it, until I found that all hope to gain it, as she had done, was idle; and then I became hard and reckless. But although you have never cared to know or see it, I have loved you dearly; and now, so you will return it and treat me as you do Helen, I promise to do all you may ask or wish. Oh, mother! do not make such a difference between your children."

"Really, Florence," replied my mother, "this is very unbecoming language. A stranger would think that I was a perfect tyrant. I am not aware that I ever treated you unjustly."

"No, not unjustly, perhaps; but unlovingly."

"I cannot help that, Florence. For the measure of my love, if it has been scant, you must blame yourself: I give my affection in the proportion in which it is deserved. From childhood you have been jealous of Helen; and, although wanting her gentleness and amiability, you are still unreasonable enough to expect to receive the same love and regard."

What angel laid his palm-branch on my mouth, to silence the passionate words of indignant justification which rose to my lips! Surely some good spirit did; or in my angry sorrow I

should have forgotten to be silent. The beautiful faith of the early church, which teaches us of holy guardian spirits given to us in baptism, is surely no mere theory, as rationalists would fain have it to be, but a real, blessed truth.

"Helen would do anything on earth for me," were the closing words of my mother's conversation.

Moved by a feeling which was better than defiance, and yet not all the love and obedience it seemed, I went, immediately after the conference was over, to Mrs. Chace; and to her surprise, after a brief greeting, addressed her thus,—

"Circumstances, upon which it is needless to dwell, have made it incumbent upon me to exert whatever abilities I have, in the most profitable manner. My sister informs me that you have expressed an opinion that I have some capabilities for the stage, and also that the profession is lucrative; may I ask if it is so?"

"Decidedly: I know of none so lucrative. You will require some training, no doubt, but less than most novices; while you have a positive advantage over all with whom I am acquainted at present, in figure, voice, and manner. I prophesy," she said, becoming elated at the prospect of her success, "that you will be a great

favourite. Your face is so expressive, and your eyes——”

“I am glad to hear it,” I answered, coldly; “in a matter of business, I am glad to hear that I have some capital. Like a horse, or a slave, it appears that the better an actress looks, the more she is worth. For the first time in my life, I thank God, heartily, that I am not a cripple.”

The bitterness with which I spoke seemed to amaze my auditor, and she said,—

“You will be delighted with the profession when once you have overcome the difficulties. There is something very fascinating in the applause of an audience.”

“Yes; because the more of it you obtain, the more you are worth. This is a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence with me, Mrs. Chace, and I can only look upon it so. Pleasure or satisfaction of any kind from such a life as that of an actress, it is impossible for me to conceive; but if, by adopting it, I can accomplish what I wish, I will embrace it.”

“Then you will of course take lessons.”

“If it is necessary, certainly.”

“Perhaps you know that I prepare pupils for the stage?”

Here was the secret of her anxiety and flat-teries.

“I was not aware of it. I understood that you only taught music.”

“Oh, yes: I have brought out several very popular actresses. Mrs. Merle, the operatic singer, you know, was a pupil of mine. But you, of course, will take the juvenile tragedy business?”

“What is that?”

“Desdemona, Cordelia, Juliet. But nowadays that line is generally taken in the country by the first lady, who plays genteel comedy as well—Rosalind, Lady Teazle, Beatrice, and such parts. You know them, of course.”

“Indeed, I do not. I never saw three plays in my life, and never read half a dozen.”

“Well, never mind, you will soon learn. Mr. Alston the tragedian drinks tea with me to-night. He shall hear you read, and then give us his opinion; in the mean time stay with me half an hour now, and you shall see a theatrical lesson given and taken. Miss Taylor, whom next to yourself I think the most promising aspirant in town, will be here directly, to read Ophelia with me and learn the music. She has about as much voice as a crow, and though she will play the part well, she will sing the snatches infamously: she has no more ear than voice either. I think you have both; I know you have one.”

“Which?”

“The voice : the compass of your voice is very great. Suppose you run up the scale with me now. Now, sound that *Do*; open your mouth, and throw your shoulders back. Now take a deep breath—now, *Do*—Excellent. Now the octave. Very well, but a little out of tune. Now we will go up regularly.”

The trial over, she said,—

“Your voice is splendid. If your ear was as good, you might become in time one of the first English contraltos on the boards; but your ear is not correct : in sustaining a note you sometimes vary half a tone.”

When I returned to our own rooms, I told my mother in very few words upon what I had decided; asking, as a mere matter of form, if what I was about to do, met with her approbation.

“Oh, yes, Flory, I am sure it does,” cried Helen. “Mamma has said all along that it was the best thing for us all; and Mrs. Chace says you are certain to succeed.”

“Yes, Florence: and that is the only consideration which reconciles me to the step, necessary as it is. Success alone can make such a life endurable, either for you or us: but that *will* make it so, and I am sure you are too proud and

ambitious not to aim at the greatest excellence it is possible to attain; therefore you have my full concurrence in your wishes."

No word of thanks; nothing but cold permission to sacrifice myself, and strive hard that as little disgrace as might be, should attend upon it.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT evening I read Beatrice to Mr. Alston the tragedian, then some passages of Constance; and his satisfaction, though equal to Mrs. Chace's, was more carefully tempered and expressed.

The next day when I went into Mrs. Chace's room I found her absent; but sitting there was a lady, whose sweet, mild face attracted me instantly.

"Pray, do not let me send you away," she said, rising as she saw me about to retire; "I am waiting for Mrs. Chace, but if I am in your way I will call again. Pray, come in."

There was a tone in her winning voice which, more than the words, induced me to obey her; and in a few minutes we were pleasantly engaged in conversation. She was evidently puzzled about me, and tried by every well-bred manœuvre to find out who and what I was, and what I was doing in Mrs. Chace's music-room. At last she hazarded the question.

"You are a pupil of Mrs. Chace's, I presume?"

"Not at present."

"She is very clever?"

"Yes, I fancy so; but I am a very incompetent judge, and I know no one who knows her. Still, I imagine and hope that she is."

The lady smiled somewhat sorrowfully.

"Pray, pardon the seeming impertinence of my inquiry, but are you about to study under Mrs. Chace for the stage?"

"Yes."

"Of course, it is by your own choice; yet I cannot help feeling sorry for it. I fear that you will not find the world behind the curtain, as bright as that before, and that you will be disappointed."

"No, that will be impossible," I answered, "for I expect nothing. All that I find even tolerable, will be so much gain, for I anticipate little but disgust and labour."

"And yet you choose it?"

"Yes; as the Duke of Clarence chose the butt of malmsey wine. A way to die, that is all."

"Forgive me, for having pained you. I had no idea that any one selecting the profession you have done, was ever otherwise than fascinated by it at first."

"Cannot you imagine a passenger on board a

burning ship leaping into a stormy sea to avoid the certain death of fire, thus giving himself a chance for life? You would not argue that he was fascinated with water, because he chose it as the alternative of fire?"

"No. But I do not see how such a case applies here."

"That is only because you do not know all the circumstances."

"Of course, of course; mine must necessarily be a very narrow view, since I know so little: still, if I might without impertinence, I would fain inquire further. Have you much interest amongst the magnates of the profession?"

"Not any. Except Mrs. Chace, whom I have seen some twenty times, and spoken to about half as often, I do not know one theatrical person."

"Then how do you propose to get on? Interest is quite as necessary to an actress's success as to a soldier's. The talent of Mrs. Siddons herself would not suffice, unless you had some influence with the managers."

"Indeed! I am very sorry for it, for I have not interest enough with any creature to procure the humblest possible employment."

As I said this, Mrs. Chace entered, and addressing the lady as Mrs. Lyndon, spoke to her in the most deferential manner.

"Thank you—presently," said Mrs. Lyndon courteously, interrupting some explanation upon which Mrs. Chace was about to enter. "First let me request you to introduce me to this young lady;—that we may know each other by our proper names if we should ever meet again," she added, turning to me with her bland smile.

"With pleasure: Miss Sackville, Mrs. Hugh Lyndon."

In a few minutes I rose to take leave, and as I did so, Mrs. Lyndon rose too, and offering her hand, said,—

"Good-morning, Miss Sackville, I have a strange fancy that you and I shall meet again ere long; if we do, I shall hope to find myself not forgotten."

"That would be impossible," I answered cordially, for I was already fascinated by her gentle and friendly, although dignified manner.

The day after, I was sitting alone, when Biddy entered with a card: it was that of Mrs. Lyndon, who followed her closely.

"I have many apologies to make," she said, "for this uncereemonious visit, but as I have an idea that I may be of use to you in your new career, I determined to come at once."

"You are very kind," was the only commonplace I could utter. She continued,—

"Mrs. Chace told me yesterday, a great deal

about you, which interested me exceedingly : although I am afraid I ought to confess, that I encouraged her loquacity more than was perhaps quite delicate ; but I can honestly assure you that I was induced by a better feeling than curiosity. I had seen enough of you before she came in, to make me wish to know more, and serve you if I could ; and happily I believe that I have the power."

Another similar commonplace. To strangers offering unexpected services of an uncertain value, what else but commonplaces can you say ?

"I am not very experienced in matters of this kind, although latterly I have heard a great deal of them, but it seems to me that the first thing necessary to be ascertained is, that you really have histrionic talent ; the next, to find a person able and willing to bring it forward. And it is in both of these things that I hope to help you. The member for —, who is one of my oldest friends, has very great theatrical influence, and is universally considered to be a first-rate judge of embryo, as well as developed talent ; and it is to him that I wish to introduce you. Now it so happens, that to-day he and the wife of the New York and Drury Lane manager, dine at my house, with one or two other friends ; and I have come in this unceremonious manner to ask you to meet them. You will thus obtain a disinterested and competent

opinion, and make a valuable friend. If Mr. Beauchamp pronounces a favourable verdict, Mrs. Cost will certainly procure you an engagement, and you will ensure to yourself a fair and honest trial. Will you come?"

"Most thankfully."

"Then I will call for you at five o'clock, and drive you to York Terrace. In the mean time, read over some play, preparatory to doing the same this evening. I wish if I can, to get you an appearance and engagement without the aid of Mrs. Chace. It will be quicker, and I think more respectable: not that I would insinuate anything against her perfect integrity, but that hers is not quite the school for a lady."

True to her promise, exactly at five o'clock, Mrs. Lyndon's carriage, herself the only occupant, called for me. In the course of the conversation which arose during our drive to the Regent's Park, I frankly told her my history.

"Poor girl, poor girl!" she said; "it is a hard and sorrowful fate: but I see no alternative. God, who opens this path before you, shutting out all others, will give you strength to walk in it. Remember his gracious promise, 'That as our day is, so our strength shall be.' Do right: do right, and fear not. He is sufficient."

This was new language: something I had not

heard for years, except on Sundays, and at church; and it silenced me.

When we reached York Terrace, we stopped at one of the largest of those handsome houses which look upon the Park, and following my new friend up stairs, entered a pretty boudoir.

"Now," said she, throwing open a door, "here is my dressing-room, and I am going to take strange liberties with you. You must look your best to-night, and must, therefore, resign yourself to the tender mercies of my incomparable Lucille. Your hair is not arranged becomingly, and you are pale as a ghost; both of these misfortunes she must remedy: the first by exercising her unrivalled taste, and the second by amusing you with a new novel while you lie down for half an hour's rest. You see to what a dangerous person you have given power over yourself; but it is useless to rebel: I am despotic here."

When she left the room to dress, she said,—

"Remember that you look your very best. You may meet an old friend, and it would not do to look ill."

Who could it be? I thought over every creature I knew, but upon no one could I fix as likely to be a friend of my hostess, whose name I had never heard until the previous day. At last, after many a vain endeavour, I relinquished the task,

and made up my mind to its being a pleasant jest of Mrs. Lyndon's.

I was, however, destined to experience a great and glad surprise; for, upon entering the drawing-room, who should come forward to meet me, but the cherished friend of my childhood, my loved and well-remembered governess.

"Miss Northey! my dear, dear Miss Northey!" I cried, clasping her hands, "how delighted I am!"

"Not more so than I am, Flory," she said, in the affectionate tones of old. "I assure you that I have been very impatient ever since I knew that you were coming. This has been a long day to me."

"Then you expected me, and this explains ——"

"Why I took such a sudden interest in you?" said Mrs. Lyndon. "Exactly. I thought, the instant I entered Mrs. Chace's room yesterday, that I knew you; and when you spoke, my opinion was confirmed. I recognised at once the 'bonny Irish lassie,' whose portrait I had so often seen in my sister's desk, and about whom I had heard so much."

Here was another surprise. Miss Northey, Mrs. Lyndon's sister. In Ireland she had always passed for the eldest of her family, and now here was a sister at least ten years older. While I was pondering over this, the door flew open, and a fine

boy ran in, and calling, "Look here, mamma!" seized Miss Northey's hand. Now I was quite bewildered.

"How perplexed you look, Flory!" said Miss Northey, laughing; "you do not seem to understand us at all, and frown as if you grudged me my sister and son.

"Go to your father, Hugh, and do not return until I send for you. First shake hands with this young lady; she is an old friend of mine. I taught her her lessons once, as I do yours now."

When he was gone, she said,—

"I will not mystify you any more, Flory. I am (as I dare say you have conjectured by this time) Miss Northey no longer. Ten years ago I gave up that name for your friend Mrs. Lyndon's, by marrying her husband's brother. The boy you have just seen is my only child; and I am afraid I do not bring him up quite as wisely as I did you."

"No, I do not think Master Hugh will ever do your teaching as much credit as Miss Sackville does," said Mrs. Lyndon. "I have heard of you so often, Miss Sackville, that, even if I had not seen your portrait as a child, I think I should have known you to be Julia's old pupil as soon as I had any conversation with you. She has so often described your disposition and feelings, that when we talked so long yesterday, I could scarcely refrain from telling you that I knew you.

And now, as I dare say you have each a great deal to talk about, I will make no apology for leaving you until dinner-time. Only remember what is to come after, and do not over-fatigue yourself, Miss Sackville;" and so, with a pleasant smile, she left us.

"Now, Flory," said my companion, when the door closed, "come here, and sit on this stool beside me, as you used to do years ago, and tell me all that has happened. Do you remember how fond you were of sitting on a stool and laying your head upon my knee, while I told you fairy tales and smoothed your tangled wig? I can scarcely fancy you are my little, wild enthusiastic pupil, you are grown so tall and calm; and yet you have the old smile, and ——"

"The old heart too," I said, eagerly, through my rising tears. "I am calm, not because I feel less, but because I have learned to control my feelings more. One soon learns to shrink from showing feeling, when its very existence is disbelieved, and any involuntary betrayal is looked upon with suspicion and distrust. Do not doubt me, because I am calm. It is only as the ice over the rushing water."

"Never mind, mavourneen!" she said, "I do not doubt you: I never did, you know. To me you were always obedient, and loving, and generous; and if you were not always as demure as

other children, I loved you better and forgot it. And now that I see the same smile, the same pleading tearful eyes—which always dimmed at loving words, as they flashed at angry ones—I need but the aid of very little fancy to imagine myself in Galway again, and that you are about to confide some heavy childish trouble to my discretion: some puzzle about the fairies, eh, Flory? Or, have you forgotten them since you have grown old and wise?”

“Try me with a new legend,” I answered. “But I have heavier sorrows now than any fairy doubt could cause; and more than ever I did, in those childish days, I need your advice and guidance now.”

“I fear so, indeed, Flory. I fear the dark days are, indeed, opening before you: but have courage, and do not shrink from them. Do your duty, Flory—do your duty, and remember who has said, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.’ But now tell me all. My sister has only given me some stray hints, facts, and surmises, out of which I can make nothing; and I want to know all: how it happens that I find you in such altered circumstances, and what you intend to do. Tell me all.”

And seated by her on a low ottoman, with my hand fast locked in hers, I did tell her all—my wishes, sorrows, hopes, and fears. Not one but

found ready sympathy from her; and happier, notwithstanding all my trials, than I had been since childhood, I listened to her consoling voice.

After dinner, at which no one but her own family, Mrs. Cost, and Mr. Beauchamp were present, my hostess said,—

“Now, Miss Sackville, will you read before Julia and me, or shall we go away?”

“Oh, stay; stay, by all means,” I said.

“Yes, the larger the audience the better,” cried the old gentleman, laughing. “You must get accustomed to the sight of strange faces, you know.”

“What play will you have?” asked Mrs. Hugh Lyndon.

“Have you ‘The Wife,’ or, ‘The Hunchback,’ or, ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ there?” inquired Mr. Beauchamp.

“All.”

“Then give her Shakspeare. Now do not be frightened, my dear young lady. You must try to fancy that you are alone; and if you can imagine yourself Juliet, so much the better.”

In a voice which trembled from emotions of all kinds, I read the first few speeches of Juliet. I acquitted myself horribly, and I knew it: so did Mr. Beauchamp, for he said, encouragingly,—

“Try Sheridan Knowles, Miss Sackville: try your countryman. Read this scene in ‘The Wife.’”

I did so. It was one that I had been accustomed to read to Sir Hugh Danvers at Ingerdyne; and I was so perfect in every word, knew so well every point and emphasis, that I succeeded completely to Mr. Beauchamp's satisfaction.

"Admirable!" he said: "you'll do, my dear. Now let me see if you have any idea of acting. Mrs. Lyndon, will you stand up in that recess, and read these few lines of the Confessor's; just to give Miss Sackville the cue. Now, Miss Sackville, let me hear if you can throw any passion into your voice and eyes."

"That will do, that will do," he said, when Mrs. Lyndon and I resumed our seats. "You are very nervous: but I think all the better of your ultimate success on that account. People who can't feel, will never make actors; and those who do feel, must be very long before they can face hundreds of gazers without tremor. Old play-goers will tell you that Miss O'Neil, even at the last, wept bitterly whenever she played Isabella or Jane Shore; and I myself have heard Mrs. Siddons sob unfeignedly. As far as my judgment goes, you have all the elements of success; but you want practice and a knowledge of stage business, both of which are essential, and both of which you ought to have, before you are brought to front a London audience."

"If she could procure an engagement in the

country," said Mrs. Cost, "either on the Bath circuit, or at Cheltenham, or any place where the audiences are educated people, and where the stars go, she would obtain much valuable practice and instruction."

"Yes; if she really determines to adopt the profession, that is what must be done."

This was said half inquiringly, and I replied,—

"I have no alternative. I am obliged, and therefore determined."

"Well then, Mrs. Lyndon, if you will drive Miss Sackville down to my house the day after to-morrow, I will introduce her to Mr. Alston the ——"

"I have already read to him at Mrs. Chace's."

"So much the better. Then he has had time to think about you, and what your chances are; and will be better prepared to give his opinion. Come, by all means; and let us hold a council upon the matter, and decide what it will be best to do."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. BEAUCHAMP was a bachelor of nearly eighty years of age. He was a person of a most beautiful disposition and mind, ever on the watch to do benevolent and kindly acts; and to his rare cheerfulness and sunny temper, might be attributed his unbroken health and never-failing spirits. With a heart as young as it had been in boyhood, he had an ever-ready sympathy with youth; and nothing which could give them pleasure, or spare them pain, was ever forgotten or neglected by him.

On the appointed day I went with Mrs. Lyndon and my old governess to Mr. Beauchamp's; Mr. Hugh Lyndon having promised to come as soon as the House was up, and escort us home. As soon as we arrived we were shown into a room in which there was no one to receive us; but we had not waited long when Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Alston entered.

A formal introduction of the latter to my companions took place, but our host, mentioning my name as quickly as possible, and then inviting his other guests to admire a magnificent cameo which he produced, led me away into a small room which opened, through folding doors of antique stained glass, from that in which we then stood; and said, in a subdued voice,—

“My mind misgives me, Miss Sackville, that I am not doing a kind or wise thing in assisting your project of going upon the stage. I think that you have taken up the idea without due consideration, or knowledge of what you will have to bear, to forfeit, and to do?”

“Perhaps you are right,” I replied. “I know very little, nothing in fact, of the minutiae of an actress’s life; but it can scarcely be worse than my fancy paints it.”

“Then why, in Heaven’s name! do you rush upon it? It is all very well for persons whose vanity finds ample recompense in applause and admiration for all they lose; but for you, for any woman with a proud and delicate spirit, a gentle heart, or a due value for the estimation in which she is held by society, it is horrible: a slow, living death.”

“I cannot help it,” I murmured.

“Why not, my good young lady, why not?”

“I cannot.”

“At least, reflect well before you take any decisive step. Once put your foot upon the boards of a theatre, and that rubicon is passed, from which there is no return. Once breathe in the pestilent air of the foot lamps, and a social degradation has commenced which can never be removed. Thenceforth you are an object for insolent familiarity, and a mark for ruinous calumny; you are your own no longer, but the property of an exacting, ungrateful, and suspicious public.

“I speak strongly, Miss Sackville, because I wish you to see the matter fairly and truly, divested of all false and glozing colours; and because I will not have upon my conscience, the sin of aiding to bring about the misery of a good young girl.

“You will find favour in the eyes of the managers, for your personal attractions; and in those very attractions, you will find your danger and your enemy. It is women who scandalize their own sex, and they seldom or never forgive another for the desperate offence of having better looks and manners than their own. And such scandal as ladies talk, is hard to bear.”

I sighed heavily, and said,—

“You did not speak thus on Thursday: then you appeared to encourage me.”

“Yes; because then I knew nothing of you: neither who nor what you were; and I spoke in

a mere business spirit. I was asked to give an opinion of your probable success, and I did so: and nothing that I said then, I retract now. It is not that I have changed my opinion of your talent, but that I would fain dissuade you from employing it upon the stage. If you were a child of mine, I would say, starve on plain sewing, wear your life away in teaching charity children, do anything, embrace anything, rather than become an actress."

"And if it were possible, I would obey you, and gladly; but it is not. I have others dependent upon me, and I must ——"

"Enough, enough, Miss Sackville! Forgive me for having gone so far; forgive me, if I have pained you. My intention was only to warn and serve you; but since that cannot be in the way I wish, I must be content with giving you all the little help I can, in your own way.

"Now we will return to our friends. First, however, let me beg you to be as cool and self-possessed as you are able, under the ordeal through which you are going to pass. Success in the eyes of the man before whom you are now to appear, may spare you a long and weary probation."

And, saying this, he took my hand as he would have done a child's, and patting it, as if to reassure me, led me back to the library.

Othello was the play selected by Mr. Alston; who, after I had read several speeches, said:—

“Will you try to go through the handkerchief scene with me? I can form a better opinion when I see what idea you have of acting. If you act Shakspeare half as well as you read him, I shall be satisfied.”

When this was over, Mr. Alston said,—

“Desdemona is not in your way, Miss Sackville, I see: she is too tame. You would play Emilia better.”

I tried to smile, and asked,—

“Well, sir, what do you think of me?”

“As I did the day I heard you read at Mrs. Chace’s. You will play very well and very ill, just as you happen to enter into the spirit of your part. I should like to see you in Juliet, or Portia.”

“Let me try Julia in the ‘Hunchback,’ or Mariana: I think I shall succeed better in either of those.”

“Very well. I will be Master Walter. Do you know the part?”

“Yes. I have learned both that, and the ‘Wife.’”

“Learned!” repeated Mr. Alston, with a smile; “you should say studied.”

I had never seen either of these plays acted; but I liked their quaint and nervous language.

as well as the characters of the heroines, and I acquitted myself satisfactorily.

"You shall hear from me very soon," said Mr. Alston, when he took leave. "I have an idea that I may speedily have an opportunity of being useful to you. Shall I address you at Mrs. Chace's?"

"If you please. I am residing in the same house with her."

By the evening post next day, I received the following note:—

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am about to close an engagement with the manager of the — theatre, to play six nights during the ensuing fortnight. My consenting to do this lays him under an obligation, which entitles me to ask a favour in return; and if it is your own and your friends' wish to obtain an appearance, in order that you and they may judge of your theatrical talent, I shall be very happy to make Mr. Osborne's concession to your wishes the stipulation I am entitled to demand.

"Let me hear from you to-morrow.

"Yours faithfully,

"T. ALSTON."

Under the advice of Mr. Beauchamp and Mrs. Hugh Lyndon, Mr. Alston's friendly offer was accepted, and the following Tuesday fortnight fixed for my *début*. I was to play Julia in the "Hunchback," and the first rehearsal was to be on the day week before the performance.

When all was settled, I felt most thoroughly miserable. While the business was incomplete, and questions of capacity or incapacity, appearance or refusal, the only pressing subjects of immediate anxiety, I thought and cared for little else. But when these were decided, and expectation had given way to certainty, my old disgust of the profession returned, and I was most wretched.

My mother saw this, and pitied me. She said nothing; but I knew by her watchfulness, and unusual kindness, that she felt for me, and this alone nerved me to go on in the course upon which I was entering.

Neglect or unkindness, a mocking word or a laugh incredulous of my suffering, would have driven me mad. Even as it was, I felt upon the very verge of insanity: I was so nervous, so excited, and so unhappy.

My dear old friend, Mrs. Lyndon, had left town to attend the sickbed of her husband's mother; and thus I lost, when I needed it most,

the support of her kind and judicious encouragement and counsel.

Our money, too, was all gone: several times lately I had been obliged to have recourse to Biddy's good offices in disposing of various little articles of jewellery and plate. My dresses for Julia were, therefore, a matter of serious consideration.

Evening dresses I had plenty, but, of course, not one with the necessary train; and how to obtain them without funds, was a most perplexing affair. True, my pearls and the majority of my mother's ornaments yet remained; but as their produce, when sold, would be urgently needed for daily bread, they afforded no resource in this emergency. And now I, who never before had spent five minutes in thinking of dress, did nothing else but ponder upon it, morning, noon, and night.

I was, however, relieved from my dilemma, by the following note from Mrs. Lyndon:—

“DEAR FLORY,

“For the sake of our old love, I have promised myself the pleasure of attiring you for the ordeal of next Tuesday. I would certainly rather assist to deck you for some other pyre; but it cannot be helped, and you will, I hope,

go through the trial bravely, believing that it is your duty.

"As I cannot be in town to assist in making up the dresses (I used to be considered very skilful in the dear old Galway days), I must beg you to order them according to the usual style, and of the most becoming materials.

"I have not forgotten the ribbons you used to buy with your own little pocket money, for 'poor dear Miss Northey;' and as you had your way then, so I must claim to have mine now.

"Do not confine the purchases you make to the amount of the enclosed note, but provide yourself handsomely; and if you love me as you used to promise that you always would, do for yourself as you know I would do for you, if I were by your side.

"My poor mother-in-law is still in great danger. Let me hear from you as soon as possible after Tuesday: before, I know you will have no time to write.

"With my sincerest love, and prayers for your protection in the new career now opening before you, believe me, dear Flory,

"Yours affectionately,

"JULIA LYNDON."

Enclosed was a cheque upon Coutts for thirty pounds.

Thus liberally provided, I went immediately to Miss Scotland, the well-known theatrical artiste, and submitted myself to her measurement and taste for the necessary dresses ; making only one stipulation, which was, that they should be as little trimmed as possible.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER one such week of mental torture as nearly rendered me unfit for the work which was to succeed it, the day for my first rehearsal arrived.

I did not sleep all the previous night, and when morning came, I was weary and feverish ; my eyes ached and burned, and my lips were parched and dry. I trembled in every limb, and although faint and hungry could not eat ; sal volatile and camphor julep were upon my table, and I swallowed large doses, vainly hoping so to quiet and stimulate my sinking frame.

Ten o'clock was the hour fixed for rehearsal, when Mr. Alston had promised to meet me at the theatre, and introduce me to the manager. He advised me to come alone, or simply to bring a servant : he thought, and wisely, that I should be better without sympathy in all my little difficulties.

Our lodgings were not far from the theatre, and I knew that if I left them a few minutes

before ten o'clock, I should have plenty of time to reach my destination ; yet every sound made me start from my chair, fearing that I was too late. I would thankfully have put off the hour until my death-day, and yet I shuddered with fear lest I should lose it.

Breakfast was laid for me, and with kind and pressing words my mother urged me to take it ; but faint as I was, I could not have eaten an atom. I tried twice, but the effort nearly choked me, and my mother saw that it was impossible. The half-hour past nine chimed from the clock upon the stairs, then the next quarter, and with a desperate effort I rose to go. Biddy was to be my escort, and now she stood beside me.

"The car's at the doore, Miss Flory, dear. Don't be cast down : remimber, 'tis always the darkest the hour before day ; and come with a bould heart. Throuble's a fleet horse, and sorra a one as iver outrun him ; but he's a rale coward too, an' always shows his heels to them as fronts him."

And, with a force which had nothing of the familiarity or impertinence which most English servants would have shown upon such an occasion, Biddy led me as passively as if I had been an infant, and placed me in the coach.

A very short time sufficed to take us to the stage door of the theatre, and when we reached it, I

summoned all the courage I could muster, and, pushing it back on its heavy springs, passed into the dingy entrance.

Oh! what a wretched place it looked: so dirty, dark, and damp. The sunbeams, so brilliant outside, could scarcely struggle in, and even when they did, they only served to make the horrors of the place more apparent. The very air seemed foul and plague-laden; I sickened as I breathed it.

A man, as dirty and repulsive as his den, was sitting before a long kind of desk, reading a newspaper. Nailed upon the wall above him, were pieces of tape, into which were stuck notes and letters, of all colours, shapes, and sizes: bills and billets-doux, MSS. never destined to be read, and letters begging for orders, were all mixed together in strange confusion.

The door-keeper raised his head as I entered, and, observing Mr. Alston's directions, I presented his card, and asked if he had arrived.

"No; he won't be here yet," said the man, looking at a grim-faced clock over the chimney-piece. "'The Hunchback' isn't called till half-past ten, and he's sure not to come before the time, though he may half an hour after."

While I stood waiting, several people, "ladies and gentlemen," as the Cerberus called them—came in, asked a passing question or two, looked

for and took their letters, stared at me, and then disappeared through a door behind the doorkeeper. Last of all came a lady superbly dressed, and carrying a little dog in her arms.

"Any letters for me, Edgar?" she asked, in a mincing voice.

"Yes. Here's three pink 'uns, and this thick white 'un; and here's two *bookets* as the gentlemen left themselves, nothing else."

And from the interior of the desk, the man brought forth two magnificent bouquets of hot-house flowers. How fair they seemed in that foul place; it seemed almost like sacrilege to bring their pure, sweet blossoms there.

"You know who that is, I s'pose?" asked the man, when the lady had disappeared.

I answered in the negative.

"Well to be sure! I thought as every man, woman, and child, on the boards knowed her. Why that's Mrs. Hurry. She's starring here a bit; and the letters and *bookets*, as comes for her is unknown. She's quarrelled with Lord Cheserton, and I should think there's a matter of five or six gent's carriages here every night after the farces, for her to choose from ——"

"May we not go up stairs?" I asked, hastily, anxious to escape the necessity of listening to the history that I saw was coming.

"Who d'ye want?"

"Mr. Alston, or the manager: I am here by appointment."

"Oh, you're the new lady as is to play Julia next week?"


"Yes."

"Oh, yes! you may go; but that young woman must stay here. 'No admittance except on business,' you know," said he with a laugh.

This arrangement did not please me at all; so, after trying in vain to soften his determination, I took half a crown from my purse, and by virtue of that little bribe obtained permission for Biddy to accompany me.

The door through which we had seen so many persons disappear, now opened for us, disclosing a long dark passage, the floor of which inclined upwards very considerably, and across which were nailed, at short intervals, pieces of wood to enable men and animals to keep a safe footing.

A company of wonderful horses had just been performing at the theatre, and as this was their only way of entrance and exit, the cleanliness of the place, which seemed as if it had never been cared for since its erection, was not improved. Long habit might, and did, make people familiar enough with this ladder-like passage, to run up and down it boldly; but when Biddy and I first essayed to mount, I felt very much as if I were clambering up



the sides of a house, instead of entering in the usual convenient manner.

It would be difficult to describe the world of darkness and confusion into which, when an upper door was gained, I entered. Of course I had never been behind the scenes of a theatre before, and had no very clear idea of what it was like; but, vague as my notions were, and fully prepared as I was for a great difference between the gay bright illusion upon which the audience looked, and the foul smoky cauldron in which it was concocted, still, anything like the reality I had never imagined.

Before me, when the door had closed with a dull jar, lay a most bewildering country. To my left was a dingy wall, against which leaned a medley of huge and strange lumber, while on the right, standing in grooves, and towering upwards to a great height, with spaces of about a yard and a half between each group, stood clustered together, what looked like gigantic packs of cards. Above, the daylight forced its way through some dirty windows which were almost wholly obscured by the "flies," pendant clouds, and machinery.


Above, below, turn which way you would, there was that horrid, sickening, suffocating smell which is inseparable from a theatre. It may seem ridiculous, but to me that smell is always connected with the idea of moral degradation. From

her Majesty's Opera House in the Haymarket, to the Victoria in Lambeth, all theatres breathe out the same disgusting and unholy air. Matter-of-fact and literal people will say that every place lighted with gas, where numberless jets are being turned off and on at all hours, smells the same ; and it may be so ; but to me—and I am only writing of myself—that foul, pestilential atmosphere seems redolent of vice and immorality.

This bad air, inhaled for the first time, came to me from all quarters ; and, more than anything I saw or heard, disgusted and sickened me.

The place seemed deserted by every visible living thing, yet sounds of laughter issued forth from the darkness ; and, tired of staring into obscurity, I tried to make my way towards them. I took a wrong turn however, and found myself in a large square room, lighted by a window nearly at the ceiling, and furnished only with a gaudy sofa, half a dozen rickety chairs with smart fringed petticoats of yellow chintz, a large pier-glass and a table. Over the chimney-piece a long and shallow glass case was fixed, containing, on slips of paper, casts of pieces to be performed during the week, and the day's "call for rehearsal."

While I stood half unconsciously contemplating this forlorn and tawdry place, a man entered whistling. He took no notice of me, except to



stare, but with his hands in his pockets walked to the fireplace, and read down the "casts," whistling as he did so. This over, he turned round, and after looking at me for a few seconds, said,—

"Are you in this here new farce?"

I controlled the contemptuous impulse which urged me to remain silent, and answered "No," as civilly as I could.

"Come to read it then, p'raps?"

"No," again. He was not at all abashed—I learned afterwards that actors never are—and persevered with his investigation.

"Been on the boards long?"

Another "No."

"Thought so: what's your line?"

Not having the least idea of what he meant, of course I could not answer him: for which I was not sorry; as I thought, and not unreasonably, that a dead silence would be, even to him, a sufficiently broad hint, that I was not inclined for his conversation. But in this I was disappointed. He wanted to know who and what I was, and until he had found that out, it was out of the power of any hint, such as a peaceably-disposed person could give him, to obtain silence.

"Got scent, I s'pose, of the row last night between the governor and Miss Vinley. My eyes! what a pair they are! always at it, hammer

and tongs. But I think this will be a settler; she's so uncommon cool over it. Women always mean mischief when they hold their tongues—it's so unnatural."

If so, I thought, what a mischievous creature I must appear just now!

"Well, I wish you luck, I'm sure. By Jove! we want some pretty gals badly enough: we're out and out the ugliest company in London."

This was quite too much, and turning quickly round I left the room. Darkness, escaping gas, and the chance of breaking my limbs among the stray properties, being all preferable to this man's society.

As I left the room, a dirty urchin, apparently about eight years old judging from his size, but with the face of a man of thirty, came to the door and looked round; he then called in a shrill voice,—

"Everybody for the first scene."

I heard the same mysterious words issuing from various quarters after the boy had disappeared, and I conjectured that he was gathering the company together. Nor was I wrong; for voices came in answer from all sorts of places, and in every variety of tone and language. For a long time I wandered about, until at length, led by the sound of voices and laughter, I found my way to the stage.

A rickety table and chair stood near the stage-box on the "prompt side"; at which, with a few ragged books and papers before him, sat the prompter. Beside him was the ubiquitous boy I had seen before; and opposite, moving about the stage, were three or four shabbily dressed people, idly reading some indistinct words from papers which they held in their hands; the only distinguishable phrases being the last line of each speech. Some did not even exert themselves so much as this, but went through the "business" in perfect silence, only uttering the last three or four words: this they called "coming to cues."

In the wings were congregated groups of ill-dressed, well-dressed, shabby and splendid people, talking and laughing—regardless of the prompter's continued—

"Sh! sh! silence, ladies and gentlemen, *if* you please."

Behind the prompter, and evidently discussing the capabilities of the stage, were the stage and acting managers; and, bearing an active share in the debate, was a scene painter; who, dressed in a loose blouze and forage cap, looked in perfect keeping with the place.

No one noticed me, and my patience was thoroughly exhausted, when after a time I heard the swing of a distant door, and in a few minutes saw Mr. Alston approaching.

"I have a thousand apologies to make," he said; "but my delay has been unavoidable. I was obliged to attend the reading of a new tragedy at the Haymarket, and have only just escaped. How long have you been here?"

"About two hours, I think."

"Did you not receive my note?"

"No. What note?"

"One that I sent to you last night, apprising you of the change of time for to-day's rehearsal."

"No. Otherwise I should not have been here so long. One would not intentionally increase the hours of attendance in this place."

"So *you* think and feel; every one does not agree with you: but *chacun à son gout*, you know. And now, to release you as speedily as possible, will you come across the stage with me, and let me introduce you to the manager? I will then try and get our rehearsal called immediately."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL eyes were turned upon us, as we crossed the stage higher up, and went over to what I afterwards learnt was the O. P. side. I trembled so much that I could scarcely walk steadily, when after the introduction, Mr. Osborne (the manager) said,—

“Would it not be better to go through Julia’s scenes at once, Mr. Alston? There will be no necessity to rehearse the whole piece until play day : everybody has played in it before.”

Mr. Alston agreed ; and the rehearsal which had been going on so long being just over, Mr. Osborne said,—

“Call ‘The Hunchback,’ Mr. McNaughten, if you please. Helen, Sir Thomas, and Modus : Master Walter, and Julia are here.”

“Helen—Miss Clifford !” shouted the call boy.

“Here !” cried a little pale flippant woman of about forty, coming forward from a group who were filling up one entire entrance, and speaking


helpless, that I felt if I did not make a desperate effort to rally, I should either sink upon the boards, or burst into tears.

I saw Mr. Alston's look of disappointment, and the shrug of the manager's shoulders, as he turned away to talk to some one in a dark corner of the stage; I saw Helen's contemptuous smile, and heard the audible expression of her pity addressed to Clifford; and a sudden revulsion took place in my feelings: pride came to my aid, and by a powerful exertion of will, I determined to conquer myself—to hear nothing but the words to which I was to reply, to see nothing but the face to which I was speaking, and, if possible, to think of nothing but what I was doing.

Thus resolved, I went on for the scene with Clifford, in which he renounces Julia. Listlessly, almost sleepily, Helen followed me; but the tones of my voice startled her, as they certainly did me, and she stared, thoroughly awakened.

Mr. Alston, Mr. Osborne, and the stage manager were standing together by the prompter, talking to him; but as I went on speaking, they stopped and looked inquisitively at me.

My heart beat fast. I dared not look at them, nor pause to think; for I felt that it would deprive me of all self-command, and that any check now would be a fatal one. It was fortunate for me, too, that in this scene I had so much to do and



say, so little time for listening or inaction: the energy once roused was kept in constant requisition, and this saved me. When the rehearsal was over, I received the warm congratulations of Mr. Osborne and Mr. Alston. "Only don't speak so fast," said the former. "Even with *your* voice, while you talk so rapidly, you cannot be always understood; and nothing offends an audience more, than either a hurried or a drawling voice."

I bowed, and treasured up the advice, common-sense telling me that it was valuable; shook hands with the manager, and went home.

On reaching it, I walked heavily and slowly up stairs into my own room. I did not think; and scarcely felt that I was awake. Had I been touched by a torpedo, my faculties could not have been more completely benumbed: they were as worthless as if I had been deprived of them. I did not suffer half the pain that afterwards ensued; but was to the full as miserable. A heavy stupifying sense of misery oppressed me, and I had not nerve to shake it off.

Two more rehearsals, and the play-day came.

Mr. Beauchamp, Mr. Lyndon, and Mrs. Cost had each sent handsome cheques for their boxes, and had used their influence to obtain a full and friendly house; while the manager, thus propitiated through his purse, was as courteous and bland as a manager could be.

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Mrs. Chace volunteered to accompany me to the theatre, to dress and remain with me during the evening; and everything, but my own courage, promised well.

All that day, faint and weary as I was, I took nothing but ether, sal volatile, and cold water; so that when night came, I was feverish and weak. I had read and re-read the play-book, until my memory appeared gone; and I began to have a dread of forgetting all I had to say.

"Never fear, never fear," said Mrs. Chace; "it will all come back to you at night: keep yourself quiet, and do not think about it." Admirable advice, needing only one thing to make it useful—practicability.

The evening sun was gilding even the smoky London world, and brightening the dusty streets, when I again entered the stage door, and became suddenly engulfed in darkness and the sickening effluvia of gas.

Girls with band-boxes, men with parcels, women with jugs half covered, and people with nothing at all, stood talking, and waiting, and rushing in and out of that lobby, until, in the clamour and confusion, I almost forgot how to escape from it, making matters ten times worse by giving way to everybody who pushed past me, at last I found myself separated from Mrs. Chace, and standing alone upon the first step of the inclined

passage. Before I reached the top, however, my companion joined me; having by her invincible coolness and readiness, succeeded in making her way easily through the crowd.

Mr. Alston had stipulated with the manager that I should have a private dressing-room; but when we reached the door we not only found it locked, but that the woman entrusted with the key was absent, no one knew where.

Biddy too, who had been despatched with the milliner's basket containing my dresses and all the necessary materials for stage adornment, was missing also. We were beginning to fear that, either there would be no Julia, or that Julia must appear in a walking costume; when the "ladies' dresser" came up, and informed us that Biddy, having found the door of the room appointed to me locked, had conveyed herself and her treasures into the general dressing-room, and had there secured "a comfortable end" of the long table.

Thither then we went, up a wide dirty staircase lighted by a miserable gas-burner, which only served to make the wretched place look more deplorable still. A door was exactly opposite to us when we reached the top, and right and left ran a broad passage, one side of which was protected from what looked like an abyss, only by a strong rough railing.

The ladies' dressing-room was on a level with

that upper world called "the flies," from whose exalted regions descend the vapoury clouds in which theatrical fairies love to float down to this lower earth. Men and boys were busy in this passage, fixing ropes and shaking out "skies" and borders; for there was to be a new ballet after the play, and they were getting the machinery in order. I narrowly escaped being pushed through the railing by one of these impatient *avant-couriers* of genii, and was very glad when our conductress opened the dressing-room door, and introduced me saying,—

"The new Julia, ladies."

The room into which, thus announced, I entered, was long and lofty. Opposite the door was a huge fireplace, and on each side, nearly at the ceiling, were three windows well curtained with dust and cobwebs. Hanging from the centre was a large gas-light, and along the walls of the room, and down the middle, ran long narrow dressers. Upon these last, were drawn, at intervals of about a yard and half apart, bold chalk lines marking the separate territory of each "lady"; and upon every space so marked, invariably stood either an entire or broken looking-glass: in most cases a candlestick with a tallow candle, ready to be lighted, and an irregular heap of something covered by a dirty towel or toilette cover.

Late in the evening, the room became full to suffocation ; but when I entered, it was only occupied by Biddy and three other females. These were Miss Clifford—the Helen of the night ; a woman nursing Miss Clifford's baby—Miss Clifford being in reality Mrs. Roberts, the low comedian's wife—and a young girl who was to be a fairy in the ballet, but was at present dressing to be my attendant in the play. They all stared inquisitively at me, except Miss Clifford ; she nodded, at the same time calling to the fairy and whispering, evidently about me and who I was, for the sylph replied, glancing under her bonnet to where I stood,—

“ Oh, indeed ! I thought it must be : nothing particular.”

“ Oh, dear no,” replied Helen ; “ very far from it.”

Just as I sank down upon the hard dressing-stool, to submit my head to the will of Mrs Chace, a sharp rap echoed on the door, and a shrill voice cried,—

“ Overture, ladies ! ”

Mrs. Chace laughed at my bewildered start, and inquiring glance.

“ They have just ‘ rung in the orchestra,’ my dear, that's all, and come to give you notice that you may lose no time. The call-boy will come again presently.”

At last I was dressed, my hair twisted into a knot of ringlets behind, and my beautiful soft India muslin train adjusted to a nicety. Mrs. Chace surveyed and approved the whole; and, as she pulled the skirt tightly down from the waist, to ensure the bodice falling into its rich rounded folds, she said, with an air of intense satisfaction,—

“ Well, certainly, there is nobody in London who can make a dress like Fanny Scotland. She is a perfect artiste: she has so much taste and judgment, and studies a figure so thoroughly. It is really worth while to be in the profession, if it were only to have one’s dresses made by Fanny.”

As she said this, the same sharp knock which had so startled me before, struck upon the door again, and the same voice cried,—

“ Five minutes, ladies!”

“ Just ready in time,” cried Mrs. Chace: “ that announcement means, my dear, that in five minutes more they will ring up the curtain; now drink this sal volatile, and come down into the green-room. Don’t be nervous: there’s nothing to fear.”

As we entered the room into which I had wandered upon my first visit to the theatre, we met Mr. Alston, who exclaimed,—

“ That’s right! I’m glad to see you ready. Come with me down to the wing, and you’ll get

used to the lights and noise before you go on. Come, keep up your courage: after the first plunge, you will find the rest is nothing. Above all things, remember to speak plainly, and don't look off at the wings. Nobody has a right to stand there: but they do; and the faces behind always harass a povice more than those in front. Come, 'My pupil—daughter!' come."

The curtain was up when we reached the wing, and scarcely a minute after, I missed Master Walter from my side, and heard the loud reception which greeted his appearance.

"You had better go on the other side," said the prompter kindly; "you can cross behind this scene, and you will be ready without hurrying yourself. Call Helen."

I did as he advised, and went with Mrs. Chace to the O. P. side. I was very faint, and trembled in every limb. My teeth jarred against each other, and I shivered as if I were standing in an east wind.

Mrs. Chace was sensible and kind. She did not scold or laugh at me, as so many under similar circumstances would have done; she did not pity me, and so make me worse; but she was silent: only putting in a cheering word now and then, and telling me in confident words and tones, that in five minutes the worst would be over and I should be as calm as ever.

A shrill whistle, which I did not understand, a scraping noise—as two carpenters answered it by pulling back on each side the scene upon the canvass back of which we had been looking—and in a moment, not well knowing how or why, I was on the stage.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MASS of lights and faces, a tremendous noise of clapping hands, and a sensation that I was curtseying, is all that I remember for the first few minutes. That I spoke was certain, because I heard the buzz of Helen's voice in answer, though unable to distinguish anything that she said, and I crossed mechanically at the right time and place, seeing her do so ; but I walked and moved as in a dream : having no more power over myself, and knowing no more what I was doing—so far as exercising thought and judgment went—than one of Madame Tussaud's wax figures.

At last the scene was over ; all its duties having been gone through in the same apathetic, nerveless, dreamy way.

When the scene-drop fell after the second act, Mr. Beauchamp and a lady wrapped in a large

opera-cloak, and holding closely to her face the fur which enveloped her throat so that none could have recognised her, came to me where I sat. They led me to a remote part of the stage, and Mrs. Hugh Lyndon (for it was she) taking both my hands, looked pityingly in my face, and said,—

“ My poor girl, you must give this up. I came to scold you : but it would be cruel to add to what you are already suffering, by a single word. You must give it up.”

“ Why ? Have I made so complete a failure ? ” I asked, in a faint whisper.

“ Yes, and no,” interrupted Mr. Beauchamp. “ No one in front can hear a word you say. It is all dumb show ; not ungraceful, certainly, but very unsatisfactory.”

“ I must do better,” I said, languidly.

“ You cannot. I fear we have mistaken your talents completely ; and you have gone through this public and painful ordeal for no purpose.”

“ I am afraid so, indeed,” said Mrs. Lyndon.

Mrs. Chace, who had missed me from the green-room, now came up, and, bowing to my companions, said,—

“ I wish you could infuse a little more courage into Miss Sackville, Mrs. Lyndon : she only requires nerve to do very well, and without it she will ruin her reputation and future prospects. A decided failure upon a first appearance can never be overcome.”

“ I am greatly disappointed,” murmured Mr. Beauchamp, as if to himself. “ I never was so mistaken in my life.”

“ I must try,” I said.

“ It is in vain : you have not the power, my dear. You read very well—beautifully—in a room ; but on the stage you are terribly at a loss. I can’t think how we could all have been so infatuated,” exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, in tones of great though suppressed annoyance ; and with, as I thought, the slightest possible tinge of contempt.


I murmured something about endeavouring ; but he said, quickly,—

“ You’ve done your best, my dear ; I know you have : everybody must see and acknowledge it ; only, unfortunately, it is a ‘ best ’ which will not do for the public. It is a most unhappy mistake. Success is the only thing that can make this profession endurable ; without it, it is detestable.”

The manner in which this was spoken stung me more than the words, and a resolve, made up of half sorrow, half defiance, took possession of me. I would neither be so contemptuously pitied, nor so coolly condemned. I *would* succeed.

The chagrin of a defeat, the blight of prospects I had forfeited so much to brighten, my mother's ruined hopes, all rushed upon me at once; and forgetting, in their greater magnitude, the terrors and languor I had so weakly suffered to unnerve and subdue me, I roused myself to such a height of indignation against my own cowardice and other people's pity, that when I went on for the scene with Master Walter, in which Julia signs the title-deeds, I was as self-possessed (although my heart beat wildly) as if I had played the part a hundred times, and was now rehearsing it alone.

An English audience is generally good-natured and patient; willing, except in rare instances, to encourage the timid and judge mercifully of a novice. I found them so that night. No sooner did they perceive that I was anxious to exert myself, than they afforded me every encouragement, and gave me every token of goodwill. While I,



finding that they were pleased and looked upon me with kindness, threw off the thrall of fear, and giving myself up to the excitement of the moment, went on with an *abandon* which would have astonished me far more than anybody else, if I had given myself time, or calmness, to think.

My only rest was now upon the stage. When off it, I paced up and down behind the scenes with a restless, anxious step; heeding no one, thinking of no one: I was in a state of wild, impetuous excitement. The stage—the stage—to be on the stage, before those blazing lights, doing, acting, striving—anything but to be still, waiting, and alone.

Mrs. Chace did not talk to me; she saw that my nerves were too tightly strung to be under my own power of control, and knew that while the tension lasted I should go on boldly; but that, if they gave way while at their present painful stretch, the reaction and depression would be extreme. Thoughtfully and kindly, therefore, she let me alone.

The curtain fell amidst thunders of applause. The instant it reached the ground, I turned mechanically away, and had reached the foot of the

nervous. I was not delirious; but as bewildered and irrational as delirium could have made me.

In this way, alone in my own room—for with much difficulty I had prevailed upon my mother to leave me—the night was spent. As morning dawned I fell asleep, overpowered at last by the narcotic effects of the stimulant, against which I had been struggling all day, and did not wake until noon.

After a dilatory toilette, upon descending to the sitting-room, I found Mrs. Lyndon and Mr. Beauchamp with my mother: Mr. Alston having only just left them.

“He came,” said Mr. Beauchamp, after a few kind words of congratulation, “with an offer; which, although he consented to bring it, he thinks with me, that you would be unwise to accept.”

“What is it?”

“To make an engagement with Mr. Osborne for the remaining six weeks of his season. He will give you in return two-thirds of one night’s clear receipts, with the prospect of a permanent engagement after this is concluded, if you are successful. What do you think of it?”

“That it will not do: not on account of the

terms, for those I don't very well understand; but because, if I am to look to ultimate success in London, as the reward of all my toils, it is very clear that London must not be the school in which I learn. It is not reasonable to expect that people will ever consider me as anything above mediocrity, when, as long as they can remember me, I have been studying my lessons before their eyes."

"That is exactly my view of the case," said Mr. Beauchamp. "My opinion is, that you should eschew London most carefully, and make every effort for a country engagement; in which you will play everything, and so acquire the ease and stage experience which are essential to success, and which cannot be gained except by practice."

"What does Mr. Alston say?" I asked.

"Precisely as we do: you have made a favourable impression upon the London public, and he thinks it would be most unwise to endanger it."

"Then that question is settled. The next and the one least easily answered is, how am I to get this country engagement?"

"Either by application to one of the many theatrical agents who abound in Bow-street, and

that respectable neighbourhood; or through some of the people who saw you last night. There were two or three country managers in the house: I saw both the Bath and York men in the green room."

"What could take them there?"

"Yourself. A first appearance is a matter of importance to all the managers; country ones especially. Somehow or other, they contrive to know the antecedents of every person who puts his or her foot upon the boards; and they as often decide upon the wisdom of making engagements from that knowledge, as from any evidence of talent.

"Beautiful and characterless women stand (I am sorry to say) the best chance with a London directeur; but with a countryman, it is very different: next to talent, character is with him of paramount importance. In country towns, where every body and thing is known, it is essential that a proper regard to appearances should be preserved, and beautiful wickedness stands almost as bad a chance in the country, as ugly stupidity does in London. And this, not because people are one bit better in the country than the town; but because they are more known, live more before each

other's eyes, and are obliged to 'assume a virtue, if they have it not.'

"The truth and bearing of all this duly considered, I think that after a few inquiries (which would be made last night) as to your friends, wardrobe, expectations, &c., you have a very fair chance of receiving a note to-day from some agent or other, who will have been instructed to write, by one of the country managers, and who will offer his services to procure you an engagement upon the usual terms."

"Won't the man call, or write himself?"

"Oh, no; that would be too straightforward: managers don't do business in that way. Like many other bargainers, it is their policy to under-rate and affect to despise, the man or thing they all the time desire to have; lest the unfortunate tyro should think too much of himself, and venture to ask his real value."

"Amiable!"

"But true, nevertheless. Take care what you do when you make your first engagement."

"The very idea terrifies me: I am certain to do, or leave undone, the very thing I ought not."

"Well, if you will trust me to be present when

you sign and seal, I may perhaps be useful to you. At any rate neither agent, nor manager will be so likely to attempt to take advantage of your inexperience, as if you were left to their mercy alone.

“And now, if your mamma can spare you, you cannot do better than get into Mrs. Lyndon’s carriage, and let her drive you four or five miles out on the Blackheath road for change of air. You look pale and weary, as if you had been up all night, and were not half awake.”

“My head aches strangely,” I said; “there is a dull heavy pain at the back of it, which I never felt before; and my eyes ache at the light: I think the air will do me good.”

“Then put on a light bonnet, and we will drive very slowly for a few miles. You shall not talk, but go to sleep if you feel inclined,” said Mrs. Lyndon.

I rose to obey her; but as I did so my brain reeled, and, without a word, I tottered and fell.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT night was the first of a brain fever which confined me to my bed for weeks, and to the house for months. For many days after I was first attacked, I lay, insensible to all outward things, upon the mattress to which I had been carried.

My first recollection is of awaking in the twilight of a hot summer evening, and finding myself alone, but so weak, that on attempting to raise my hands to remove what felt like a weight from my forehead, I was utterly unable to do so. The pillow upon which my head rested, was hard and wet, and there was a sickening smell of ether in the room. For a moment I tried to think, and remember what had happened, but the effort was too great; my temples throbbed painfully, my eyelids fell heavily, and I became again insensible.

Night with her solemn and quiet gloom had replaced twilight, when I next awoke; and became conscious of low voices speaking near me. My mother's was the only one I recognised, and it was subdued and tremulous. I had no clear conception of what the words meant, but by some instinct I knew that they applied to me. They were these,—

“I will not deceive you, madam. The danger is great, and as imminent as you fear. For although within the last few hours there is some slight improvement, still I dare not hold out much hope. The crisis will, as I believe, take place to-night; if she passes it favourably—that is, if she awakes relieved, free from delirium and fever, all may go well; but if not, I have little hope.”

“It is strange,” continued the same speaker, thoughtfully, after a pause, “that you should have no idea of the cause of this attack. Nothing but most severe and protracted mental suffering can have occasioned it; and it seems scarcely possible that so young a lady can have so deep a sorrow unknown to her family.”

“I have not the most remote idea,” said my mother. “She has always seemed to suffer less from our late reverses, than any one else in the

family ; and although at first she certainly disliked the profession she has embraced, yet ultimately she adopted it of her own free will ; and having done so, has since appeared not only reconciled, but satisfied with it."

"It is very strange," repeated the voice. "I think you said before, that there is no attachment in the case?"

"Certainly: none that I am aware of. My daughter is not a girl likely to fall in love."

"So I imagine, from what I have heard you say before: well, it is all very strange."

These words passed, as it were, through my brain, without the exercise on my part of a single faculty. Without intending to listen, I heard: without reflecting, I understood. I could not have been quite conscious, for they left no impression; neither alarm, anger, nor sorrow. I forgot them as soon as they were spoken, and it was not until many weeks after that I recollected them.

Days and weeks followed this, and, although conscious of people coming to my bedside and speaking to me, I knew no more. One minute after any occurrence, I could not have recalled it. Faces that I knew, came round and spoke to me;

but although they were familiar, I could not have named them: the continuous effort of thought needful to do so, would have thrown me into new agonies of pain; and that which I already suffered was excessive.

At last, little by little, I began to improve, and recognise people and things. My mother's care of me was unwearied; but Helen I seldom saw from week's end to week's end: nor did I regret it, for she was so thoughtless and unquiet, that a visit from her invariably threw me back for several days.

It is a wretched state, that vague dreamy perplexity which succeeds a long illness. The constant striving to remember, to exert one's faculties and powers, to do as one used to do before; and the perpetual and imperative check which meets all our efforts and wishes, combine to render the condition of a slowly-recovering invalid, one of the most distressing that can be imagined.

The only fact of which for a considerable time I was thoroughly conscious, was the perpetual gloom which hung over my mother. Never for one single moment did she neglect or forget me, or the comforts which Dr. Belford prescribed; but although she was always on the alert to minister

to my wants, she never smiled or seemed at ease. Whatever questions I asked, she either silenced or evaded; and as my intellects gathered strength, I saw that she was pondering and grieving over the future.

It is wonderful how poverty quickens the perceptions, and often aids us more than care or medicine in our struggle against illness. How the knowledge that we can't afford to be ill, helps us to shake it off. A rich man, smitten with the hand of disease, lies passive, resigned, sorrowful, and quiescent; but a poor one feels that he must be up and doing: like the rush in the fable, he bends submissively to the storm with which he cannot wrestle; and when it has passed, instead of yielding to exhaustion, or "trusting to time," rallies all his powers of mind and body, and struggles manfully with his foe. And thus it was in my case; for no sooner did returning intellect enable me to divine the cause of the gloom upon my mother's brow, than I exerted every nerve to second the efforts of my physician, and regain my strength, in order to be useful to her.

Although not by nature cowardly at pain, I am thoroughly so at debility. Nothing is to me

so terrible as weakness : no paroxysm of suffering, however intense, subdues my courage like it : as poor people say, "it daunts one"; making me thoroughly unhappy.

During my onward progress to health, I felt this grievously. Often and often I wept, despondingly, when, upon essaying to perform for myself some slight service, I found that I was compelled to desist from utter incapability of exertion; and, dissatisfied with my lagging progress to convalescence, began at last to fancy that recovery was hopeless.

Still, with all the little energy of body and mind at my command, I battled with this feeling; and soon found, as most will who make the trial sincerely, that the resolution to get well did more towards effecting my recovery, than all the foreign aid which I received, great and skilful as it was.

Summer and autumn came and went, however, before I left the sofa; and even then, when winter was some weeks old, I could not walk without assistance.

All this time, Mrs. Chace was most kind and attentive; sharing my mother's watch over me with great patience and friendliness. Pert, offi-

cious, and disagreeable as she had seemed to me in days of prosperity and health, in sickness and sorrow she was cheerful, willing, and thoughtful; ever ready to do what she could, and to offer and urge her services.

Two serious misfortunes had befallen me while I lay insensible, the full amount of which I was not long before I realized. These were, the sudden death of my kind and valued friend, Mr. Beauchamp, and the dangerous illness of Mrs. Hugh Lyndon; to facilitate her recovery from which, she had been ordered to winter in Italy; whither my beloved friend, her sister-in-law, had accompanied her.

All this I learned by degrees. They were afraid to tell me such heavy news at once, and so broke it to me little by little: a most unwise plan to follow in any case, but especially so in mine, and with people of a similar temperament. To us one heavy blow, in which all is told, is easier to bear than a succession of lesser ones, coming at uncertain intervals.

There is a great relief to minds of a certain calibre, in knowing the worst, and *at once*. All their strength is roused to meet it, and it generally proves sufficient for the need. When fully

convinced that the worst is told, that nothing lies behind, every energy is brought to bear upon it; but when tidings of sorrow come piecemeal, doled out to us, as it were, by well-meaning but injudicious friends, "now a bit, and then a bit," it is impossible to rally: because one is never at ease; never certain that this grief, when conquered, is the last on the list. And in such a case, to imaginative minds, the indefinite too often becomes the infinite.

The death of Mr. Beauchamp was to me a most serious misfortune; for with him had expired all my theatrical interest. Mr. Alston, Mr. Osborne, and the whole theatrical clique, having, of course, only exerted themselves in my favour as the *protégée* of so popular and influential a man as the member for ——. The uncertain length of Mrs. Hugh Lyndon's absence, too, added considerably to my difficulties; for, although when I first had decided upon adopting the stage as a profession, I had neither known her nor Mr. Beauchamp, yet, having done so before my first appearance, and being indebted solely to them for it, I had learned to rely upon them so implicitly, that now I felt helpless and desolate.

During my convalescence—in fact, from the day I was first able to think rationally—I had lost no opportunity of studying; so that, when I recovered, I was perfect in the words of many parts.

Only once I alluded to the subject before my mother; it was when she said, with an involuntary sigh, that our circumstances and prospects were now melancholy indeed, since it was evident that I could not continue to pursue the theatrical profession.

“And why not, mother, dear?” I asked, cheerfully; “because of my shaven crown? If that’s all, so long as there are wigs and frontlets to be bought at every hairdresser’s shop in this good city of London, *that* need be no impediment; and I know of no other: do you?”

“Yes; your own dislike.”

“Nay, mother, I have bid good-bye to such luxuries as likes and dislikes long ago; and really, if I could ensure from the stage sufficient remuneration to provide the necessary means we require for existence, it would be very little more hateful to me than any other way of earning a living: in some things, perhaps, rather less so.”

My mother’s countenance brightened as I spoke, and she replied, earnestly,—

"I am glad to hear you say this, Florence. I was afraid that your mind was set firmly against it, and I can see nothing else which promises to be so lucrative."

"Nor I; and, therefore, you need never apprehend that I shall change my mind. I am become intensely mercenary."

"That is the last thing you will ever become, Florence," exclaimed my mother, cordially, with a certain tremulousness of voice, as she turned away.

I cannot tell how it was, whether it arose from my utter dependence upon her and the proneness of human nature to love the thing it cherishes, but there existed at this time a better understanding between my mother and myself than we had ever enjoyed before; and the natural consequence was, that instead of looking forward to the life of trial and sacrifice which lay before me, with the unmitigated disgust I had always hitherto experienced when thinking of it, I began to view it in the more pleasant light of a means by which I might express to my mother, the gratitude with which her kindness during my illness had inspired me.

And it was well that I did so; for just at this

time I was shewn the following terrible letter from my father, which had been wisely and kindly withheld from me until I recovered; and which if I had not been strongly nerved by the memory of my mother's kindness, would have caused me to falter in my duty, if not wholly to abandon it:—

“ By a strange chance I have received intelligence of your late most disgraceful adventure. At first I could scarcely bring myself to credit that even you and your mother, reckless as your proceedings have always been, and lost as you are to all sense of the dignity of your family, could have been guilty of so monstrous an act; but the authority upon whose report I speak, is of too high a character to suffer me to doubt his information.

“ The most charitable way of accounting for such wilful and flagrant degradation, is to suppose that you are insane; but as even this will not be accepted as an excuse by the world, I lay my commands upon you instantly, and *for ever*, to abandon the life you have chosen, and to leave London, the scene of your disgrace, immediately. If you do not at once obey me, I shall take

means to compel you, since I will never permit my name to be dishonoured by your audacious folly.

“ But under any circumstances, or any amount of humiliation and contrition, I desire you to understand, that I shall never recognise you again. I will never acknowledge for my daughter a girl who has disgraced her name as you have done. No extremes of fortune—brought on by your own extravagance—in which you may have been placed, will ever justify or atone to me for the course you have taken. With the education I gave you, at a time when I could ill afford it, you might surely have gained a decent and creditable living; and, under a different appellation, have screened your family from the degradation of having it known that one member of it was reduced to work for hire. But as you have thought fit to pursue an opposite course, you cannot be surprised at my resolution to discard you utterly. I sincerely hope that I may hear of you no more.

“ GERALD SACKVILLE.”

To these most cruel and undeserved threats and reproaches, there was as usual no address, no

date. I could not even guess whence the letter came, nor, had I been ever so much inclined, have answered it; so, after the first bitter pangs of mortification and sorrow, I laid it by and strove to forget it.

For scarcely more than a moment did it make me falter in the resolution I had formed, or doubt whether I was right: I felt, I knew that I was; and when the first shock was past, I determined to go on.

Sometimes a wandering thought pointing to Mr. Lyle, who, if he knew my difficulties would surely relieve them, came stealing to my heart; but the memory of his strongly expressed resolve to do nothing for my mother or Helen, discouraged and chilled me, and effectually precluded my seeking help or emancipation from him. To no one else could I look. Mr. Comberton was dead, and his family dispersed; the Vaughtons were abroad, I knew not where; the Spencers, upon whom alone I could rely, *I could not apply to*; and dear Mrs. Lyndon, when we first talked upon the subject, had said:—

“Detesting this profession as you do, Flory, you may think it strange that I do not seek to dissuade you from it. But it has always been my

habit never to throw obstacles in the way of any enterprise or path of life, unless I were prepared to offer help to a better; and this I am not able to do in your case. Were you alone, you know how gladly and gratefully I would offer you a home; but with your mother and sister what can I do? they are so thoroughly helpless and *exigante*, that it would be impossible to provide for them out of the very small means at my disposal. Therefore, I think, that to help you in the painful but necessary career upon which you have entered, will be the wisest and most effectual way of rendering you assistance; especially as I have none of the fears for you which those who know you less, may very fairly have: a good and virtuous woman sanctifies any life, however much it may be at variance with the world's received opinions.

“Do not mistake me, and think that under ordinary circumstances, I would advocate any departure from the acknowledged habits and usages of society; they are generally right, founded upon reason and experience, and should therefore be respected; but there are cases, and yours is one, when a slavish obedience to arbitrary rules would involve a plain neglect of duty. If it were

optional with you to choose between the stage and any other profession offering equal advantages, then I would urge you by every means in my power to take the other course; but it does not: you have no choice; and until you have, it is no part of a friend's duty to add to your difficulties by dissuading you from following the path of obedience."

Thus were all my friends disposed of: from none could I look for sufficient aid to enable me to maintain my family, without embracing this hateful profession. I was now in the same strait in which I had found myself once before, on that sad night when I had visited my father in London, in the hope that Ingerdyne might be rescued. But now, I had not Mr. Lyle to fly to in my distress.

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